Redefining Success Through the Educational Experiences of Indigenous Adult Learners

by

Natasha Karen Jean Myette

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
University of Alberta

Abstract

Early school leavers can provide valuable insight on their experiences within the educational sector. This research explores Indigenous understandings of success, particularly those that are not reflected in contemporary mainstream educational institutions. This thesis includes 11 narrative interviews with 9 self-identifying First Nations people, one Métis individual, and one First Nations elder.[1] Ten interviews were conducted with individuals who had an early secondary leaver status[2], including an Adult Basic Education (ABE) past.[3] A narrative methodology based on central tenets of Indigenous values was used as a means of engaging with the participants. First Nation and Métis (FNM) interviewees addressed their educational experiences beginning with their earliest memories up until present day aspirations, including the educational barriers they encountered, which consequently led to their early leaver status. Social reproduction theory is utilized within the analysis of this paper, including an emphasis of how varying forms of capital play a pivotal role in structural inequality. The results of this thesis suggest that Indigenous students experience educational barriers in the areas of: (1) fitting in within mainstream educational institutions; (2) facing negative inaccurate perceptions; and (3) fulfilling familial financial and care obligations. ABE programs challenge notions of social reproduction by: (1) supporting educational completion and acting as a stepping stone to higher education; (2) facilitating feelings of fitting in; (3) provisioning of essential supports; and (4) promoting aspects of culturally responsive education. In terms of success, participants suggested that success is: (1) rooted in the youth; (2) rooted in community resilience; and, encompasses (3) Indigenous values, beliefs, and worldviews.

[1] The First Nations elder participated to provide information on his educational experiences as well as providing project guidance and overall knowledge.
[2] Early leaver status or early secondary leaver status or early school leavers are individuals who left secondary school prematurely, prior to being awarded a high school diploma
[3] One individual completed her education through GED (General Educational Development)

Preface

This thesis is the original work by Natasha Karen Jean Myette. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Dedication

I dedicate this to all of my loved ones. I appreciate your support, love and encouragement throughout my educational journey.

To all my relations, including my Fiddler, Larocque, and Bell family.
To my mom and dad, Valerie and Glen Myette.
To my grandparents, grandpa Armand (Bishaw), grandma Marjorie and grandma Victoria.
To my partner, Brett Mancell. I appreciate all of the encouragement and love you have provided me throughout all my years of education. And to his mother Nancy Mancell, thank you for being a positive support from day one.
To my best friends, Meghan, Alyssa and Shalayn.
And to my siblings, Chantelle, Jaycee, Nêhiyaw-iskwêw, Billy Ray, Naomi, Julia and Miracle.

I dedicate this work to the those who participated in telling their stories, and truths.

And lastly, I dedicate this work to others who are persevering to make their lives better by reaching health and happiness, and whatever else in their lives that fulfill them to leading a successful life.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the following individuals.

Dr. Irene Shankar, without you I would not be a MA student, let alone an MA graduate. Thank you for reaching out to me and believing in me even though I often did not believe in myself.

Dr. Tim Haney and Dr. Isha Sharma, thank you for helping me in the graduate school application process. Without your promising support, I would not be here today conquering my own personal educational barriers.

Dr. Michelle Maroto, thank you for providing me with much needed support along this rocky educational endeavor of mine. I highly appreciate your patience and guidance throughout this time.

Dr. Amy Kaler, thank you for always being a kind and encouraging individual, as well as being a member on my committee. I appreciate each and every time you have reached out to me to ensure that I was doing ok. For that, I am grateful.

Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, thank you for being involved in my project as a committee member. You made a huge impact on my overall confidence of this project. Thank you for being a role model in my time of need.

Table of Contents

Tables

Keywords

Indigenous Education, Adult Basic Education (ABE), Success, Educational Barriers, Responsive Education, Indigenous Methodology, Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, Social Capital, Economic Capital, Canada

Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are of considerable concern and have been addressed and interpreted in varying ways. Within my research, I have also found myself conflicted as to how to address this concern in a way that is in line with my own personal ethical considerations, which include producing work that is authentic to the participants' experiences and conducted in a way that centralizes harm-reduction techniques and the balancing of power differentials. This thesis addresses research concerns stemming from the Indigenous community in relation to methodology, previous literature, and principles of interacting with Indigenous participants. In addition, this work has been guided with good intentions and respect. This thesis highlights inequities in education in three areas. First, this project engages with the educational gap. Second, this project explores ABE programs and their relationship with social reproduction. Third, this project prioritizes the exploration of Indigenous understandings of success.

Studying Indigenous persons who left school early but then returned through ABE programs can provide insight on the varied educational pathways of Indigenous people within the Canadian educational system. By acknowledging that many Indigenous early school leavers often return to school later in life, this research provides an opportunity to understand what brought them to leave school initially, including possible subsequent attempts, and where they are now in terms of their educational pursuits. The structural inequalities of education need to be unraveled and corrected in order for the Indigenous population to prosper generally, as well as educationally in their own goals of self-determination.

I address the following research questions: (1) What factors contributed to the educational pathways of FNM early education leavers? (2) How do ABE programs work to challenge social reproduction in education? and (3) In light of broader structural constraints,

how do early leavers who have returned to an adult educational program define educational success?

This thesis incorporates Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. To briefly state, social reproduction suggests that social inequalities are recycled through the educational system as particular bodies (white, middle class) are better positioned to do well in the educational sector compared to many less advantaged groups; better positioned groups have a 'leg up' because they have that "initial familiarity of the dominant culture" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 494). Having 'a leg up' is correlated with conventional notions of success (educational completion), thus perpetuating structural inequality with the educational sector. This research largely agrees with Bourdieu's theory, as Indigeneity (worldviews and beliefs) are not rewarded in mainstream educational institutions. This is apparent in consideration of the disproportionate levels of educational barriers that the Indigenous population faces. These barriers stem from Canada's exploitive history of settler colonialism, as well as contemporary racism and discrimination. A large reason that Indigenous students do not do well in the educational sector is their lack of capital, particularly economic capital, as well as social and cultural capital. However, this research suggests that ABE institutions that cater to Indigenous students may alleviate barriers for this population and therefore challenge aspects of social reproduction. Understanding success from an Indigenous perspective can be a useful tool for ABE programming devoted to meeting the needs of Indigenous students, as such understandings can be utilized within educational pedagogy and philosophy and this is conducive to creating culturally responsive educational systems.

My key findings suggest that many people (wrongly) blame individual persons for prematurely leaving school. The current mainstream educational system alienates Indigenous students and facilitates feelings of not fitting in. This is largely due to experiences of racism, classism and discrimination within the educational system that perpetuates inequality by privileging the cultural capital and knowledge of the white middle-class population. In addition,

students felt that they were inaccurately perceived by peers and educators, often attributing these misperceptions in the same regard, due to racism, classism, and discrimination. They also left school early because they had family obligations that the educational system would not accommodate, including caring for young and/or sick family members, and working at an early age to help financially provide for themselves, and, at times, for the wellbeing of their family. Within this sample, supporting the family unit was perceived to be largely due to economic issues, however, it is important to note that Indigenous understandings of family and community may also be at play.

This thesis also takes an exploratory approach to participants' general perceptions of their ABE educational institution(s). Participants reflecting on what worked and what did not work with regard to their experiences in these educational centres is of primary importance. The ABE institutions addressed within this thesis vary to the extent to which they cater to Indigenous learners. ABE programs create inclusive environments as participants spoke of new-found acceptance and "fitting in" within these specific educational institutions. In addition, ABE programming may challenge social reproduction in education considering the additional supports offered. An example of this is emergency financial support. Ultimately, many of the participants completed their ABE and went on to pursue further educational programming, which indicates the effectiveness of such programs.

In terms of Indigenous understandings of success, participants shared three central perspectives. First, participants understood the concept as being youth oriented; youth in the community were prioritized with regard to reaching success as a community. Much focus centered on providing programs and experiences to youth that would elevate them as strong Indigenous peoples. The second key finding revolves around community resilience in terms of Indigenous survival despite the high rates of suicide, as well as being resilient as individuals who have overcome a variety of adversities (e.g., abuse, addictions, and poverty). Finally, success was viewed as encapsulating Indigenous knowledges, values, and beliefs. Emphasis was placed on

language, traditional methods of survival including knowledge of the land, and important values, such as the value of respect. Many Indigenous understandings of success were also connected to education and employment but ultimately, larger themes flowed through participant narratives.

Indigenous Educational Importance

The Indigenous community perceives education to be the "new age buffalo" - a means of sustenance in present-day society. This sentiment has been expressed consistently, including within the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) document. Two calls upon the federal government were particularly relevant to this research topic:

> A call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate the education and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians; and also, a call for the improvement of education attainment levels and success rates (TRC, 2015a, p. 1-2).

In the same year, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) commended Canadian Institutions in relation to their commitment to supporting success and to prioritize closing the educational gap (AFN, 2015, para. 2). The persistence of the educational gap has also been characterized as a violation of human rights, as education is key to lessening social stratification as well as achieving empowerment and self-determination (Champagne, 2009, p. 141).

It is essential to stress the importance of work on the subject of Indigenous educational inequality, as educational rates are directly related to Indigenous prosperity. Providing useful information and insight into Indigenous perspectives is also important as a means of efforts to reduce and eliminate this inequality. Credible and consistent newly produced sources, such as this work, serve to reduce the risk of audiences perceiving these issues to be historical in nature, but rather, understanding them to be prominent issues in present day society. Addressing educational inequality, and its direct association to lower socioeconomic status, can influence overall Indigenous health and wellbeing as education is a determinant of health (Raphael, 2016, p. 3). For example, Bailey (2016) posits “the attainment of higher levels of education is related to

an improved standard of living… greater employment satisfaction, higher incomes, improved health and longevity of life…" (p. 1261). In addition to income and education, food, housing, employment and access to social services are other examples of social determinants of health (Raphael, 2016, p. 3). It is integral to continuously highlight Indigenous educational disparities, and understand how colonialism, and other factors such as discrimination (racism and classism) continue to perpetuate inequality in Canadian society. If policy makers, educators, and the public as a whole are educated on systemic barriers to education including how the Indigenous community perceives success, progress can continue to be made in this area.

This thesis is organized as follows: Chapter one includes an overall introduction of the thesis and key aspects that will be addressed throughout. Chapter two includes a focus on the history of education for Indigenous learners in a Canadian context with a discussion on settler-colonialism and the corresponding implications to present day Indigenous education. Chapter three includes the theoretical framework and literature review. Chapter four includes an in-depth methodology section with particular attention paid to conducting research in an encompassing way in regard to Indigenous contexts. Chapters five through seven present the empirical findings. Chapter five is the first results chapter pertaining to educational barriers. Chapter six is the second results chapter addressing how ABE institutions challenge notions of social reproduction. Chapter seven is the third results chapter which focuses on Indigenous understandings of success. Chapter eight is the discussion chapter, providing an emphasis on the main contributions of this work. Chapter nine concludes this research paper by providing an overview of how social reproduction applied to this work, including sections devoted to limitations, future research opportunities, and overall final thoughts.

Chapter 2: History: Colonialism, Assimilation and the Role of Residential Schools

As an academic engaging in Indigenous content, it is vital to begin with an overview on the historical and ongoing implications of settler-colonialism. In terms of education, First Nations people engaged in education differently prior to colonization. The education system was previously centered around learning about the environment and survival, among other integral areas related to cultural knowledge (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples [SSCAP], 2011, p. 5). According to SSCAP (2011), "knowledge transfer was situated in a spiritual worldview and it was transmitted by elders and members of the community through an informal process that provided youth the skills and attitudes for daily life" (p. 5). These educational systems were stated to be well-established and should be respected as such (SSCAP, 2011, p. 5). However, following colonialism, the development of Indian residential schools occurred.

Colonialism includes a Eurocentric ideology that legitimized the maltreatment of Indigenous bodies (Voyageur, 2011, p. 59). The most prevalent colonial assimilation tactics include the Indian Act and residential schools. The Indian Act is an active piece of legislation devised by the Canadian government to "define who was and was not an Indian, to civilize the Indian, and to manage the Indian people and their lands" (Voyageur, 2011, p. 59). This piece of legislation dictates who is recognized as an Indian in Canadian society.

The Indigenous group in Canada, recognized in the Constitution Act of 1982, comprises First Nations (status and non-status Indians), Métis, and Inuit populations, but there are significant differences within and between groups (Gallop & Bastien, 2016, p. 208). It is important to note that it is legality that separates status Indians from non-status Indians (Harper & Thompson, 2017, p. 44). Non-status Indians are categorized as First Nations people, although they do not meet the Indian Act requirements for registration. Harper and Thompson (2017) posit:

> A non-status Indian may be no less Indigenous than a status Indian and may identify culturally just as strongly as (or more than) a status Indian. However, because of gender discrimination and the convoluted and ambiguous criteria within the Indian Act (S. 6) as to who is and who is not an Indian, non-status Indians usually have no legal ties to their home reserves and are often excluded from land claims, treaties, and other similar agreements (p. 44).

In other words, First Nation individuals vary in rights in accordance to the Indian Act and this designation is not based on levels of indigeneity or cultural identification, despite popular belief. The ambiguity of status and non-status designation was very present within this study. Two participants were recognized differently (as Métis and non-Status Indian) earlier in their lives and through changes in the Indian Act, they were able to become instated as status-Indians (teenager; 30's).

Aside from the Indian Act, residential schools are another assimilationist method stemming from settler-colonialism. It is estimated that at least 100,000 children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in residential schools (NWAC, 2017, p. 1).[4] Residential schools are arguably one of the primary methods of assimilation in Canada (Gallop & Bastien, 2016, p. 208), and they have been commonly referred to as 'schools that take the Indian out of the man'.

Within these schools, children were subjected to harsh punishments for speaking their Indigenous languages and for engaging in traditional ceremony and dress (NWAC, 2017, p. 2). In addition, physical, verbal and sexual abuse was commonplace, as well as child labour (NWAC, 2017, p. 2). Teachers in residential schools were poorly trained and consequently lacked certification to properly educate the First Nation children who attended the schools. According to NWAC (2017), "40% of residential school teachers were not trained but rather hired for missionary purposes and this was one of the reasons that led to low academic engagement and

[4] Residential schools is an umbrella term most commonly used; however, other terms such as industrial schools and boarding schools are also used in reference to residential schools (Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), 2017, p.1).

achievement" (p. 208). The trauma of residential schools was discussed by many participants within varying degrees.

The last residential school closed its doors in 1996 in Gordon, Saskatchewan but their legacy remains (NWAC, 2017, p. 2). The TRC addressed the residential school legacy:

> It is reflected in the significant disparities in education, income, and health between Aboriginal people and other Canadians—disparities that condemn many Aboriginal people to shorter, poorer, and more troubled lives. The legacy is also reflected in the intense racism and the systemic discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country. The beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of residential schools are not things of the past: they continue to animate official Aboriginal policy today. (TRC 2015b, 103-104; McGregor, 2018, p. 813).

Residential schooling has ultimately set the stage of Indigenous education today. Thus, it is necessary and important to understand how residential schooling has influenced present day educational inequalities, as well as overall inequalities, commonly referenced in relation to intergenerational trauma.

Elder Armand, a participant in this study, briefly spent some time addressing parts of his experiences in the residential schooling system as he attended the residential schools in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan as well as in Beauval, Saskatchewan. Elder Armand posits:

> The worst thing about [residential] school is that they are pretty strict and it's like they had no mercy. They had a strap that was this long; it was 4 inches [wide] and they would hold your hands like this, and they strapped you until you cried. If you didn't cry, then they would just keep strapping you. Those that tried to act tough, boy they really got it. The religion… it was just about every possible thing; there was too many sins, I guess. They spent more time on religion and we only had 4 subjects in the classroom and the rest of it was about an hour and a half every morning, was religion… Catholic. A lot of us used to get tired of it and when we used to go to church… I was an altar boy too; I used to serve the priest and I had to answer him in Latin. I didn't understand what I was saying… When I was six years old, this one kid was teasing me a little bit and fooling around and got me going and I got a good yardstick behind my back. They would just sneak up and hit you for not sitting still. The other kid was fooling around.

Elder Armand did not want to go back to the residential school as he was there for 10 months of the year. At least one time, the school only took them halfway home to a relative's house in Loon, Lake, Saskatchewan. Elder Armand posited:

> Indian affairs told my dad that I had to go back to school; they said, "he's not 16 yet". My dad told me that and said that "they're going to pick you up and take you back to school

> in Beauval. I said, “I don’t want to go back there”. He said, “well, you have no choice”. So, I was supposed to be picked up at about 11 o’clock that morning and there was a big bush behind our house, so I walked into the bush and went to seven hills… [I] took a boat and stayed there for a month because I didn’t want to go back to the residential school, no way. It was the way we were treated. Well, I never did go back to the residential school. I used to cry like hell about going back. I felt like my parents didn’t care but they had no choice because of Indian Affairs; they were forced to send us over there. In 1959, they pulled us out at that time to go to day school. I dropped out.

Elder Armand provided a glimpse of his experiences at the residential schools that he attended. In regard to his experience, he did not like it there because of the strictness, abuse, and central focus on religion rather than academics. He also did not like that he had to leave his home and his parents for 10 months of the year, and rather than being taken home, he was often dropped off with relatives in neighbouring First Nation communities. It is important to keep in mind that this is one short excerpt of an individual’s experience and it is not indicative of the collective experience. The intentions of this piece are to provide a short story from an individual who experienced residential schools first hand and wished to share a portion of his story for academic purposes.

Chapter 3: Background

Social Reproduction in Education

The educational system operates as a tool of social reproduction as contemporary education fails to promote equality and opportunity (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 494). Social reproduction encompasses the idea that specified populations (white, middle class) have an inherent predisposition to gaining the necessary knowledge from the educational system to prosper in society; others, are subject to disadvantage as they are operating in a system where their culture, beliefs and attitudes are not represented (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 494). Inequalities are reproduced in the education sector as these specified groups are predisposed to succeed, while others do not have these advantages because of cultural and economic differences (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 494).

This thesis utilizes social reproduction theory as a means of addressing Indigenous educational inequality. Integral components of this theory include various forms of capital such as economic, social, and cultural capital and how these forms of capital connect to the concept habitus. Together, these concepts help to unravel how educational systems actually perpetuate inequality, leaving particular populations at a disadvantage. This is the very location where Indigenous students may blame themselves for failing to conventionally succeed within the educational sector.

This theory allows for a thorough breakdown of understanding how educational barriers materialize and disproportionately affect particular populations. Social reproduction in education can also be challenged, particularly when it comes to ABE programming and services, and the possible effect these programs have on alleviating barriers that disproportionately affect Indigenous students. Ultimately, social reproduction theory allows for a thorough analysis of structural inequality that is built into the educational system, as well as how educational institutions that cater to Indigenous learners can further meet the needs of its student body.

Educational success, for Bourdieu, revolves around cultural capital, as it provides an explanation as to why some people fare well in the educational system (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). Cultural capital goes 'hand in hand' with established class status (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). The better off an individual is economically, the higher their valued cultural capital will be and ultimately, is a strong indicator of achievement levels within the educational sector. Success for Bourdieu is enmeshed in capital accumulation, which is an unwavering system that privileges some while leaving others disadvantaged. Stuber (2011) proclaims that:

> because educational institutions are structured not in class neutral ways, but in ways that reflect the social and cultural assumptions of the dominant classes, students who enter higher education with the social and cultural tools of the dominant classes are likely to have greater success (p. 164).

FNM populations are not dominant within the mainstream educational sector and therefore do not have their social and cultural assumptions represented within the educational institutions, therefore putting them at a disadvantage educationally.

It is imperative to address the structural causes of the educational gap as researchers have been criticized of falling into 'deficit thinking'. Deficit thinking is characterized as the "inference that Indigenous cultures and students are lacking and assume that the task is to rectify their shortcomings and failings" (OECD, 2017, p. 29). This thought process has been problematized as research conducted in this manner often elicits a response based solely on deficits rather than recognizing "diverse rights, strengths and positives" within the Indigenous community (OECD, 2017, p. 29). By recognizing Indigenous rights, strengths and positives, ABE programming can facilitate an environment that is in the best interest of the population it serves.

Examining the educational gap through social reproduction theory addresses the structural inequality that persists and how it negatively effects particular populations, such as the Indigenous population. This project does not fall into deficit thinking as barriers to education are addressed structurally rather than oriented individually. However, it is important

to continuously highlight barriers to education that disproportionately affect Indigenous populations as improved education rates correlate to Indigenous overall health and wellbeing as well as moving forward with goals of self-determination. This thesis also serves as an empowering resource that creates space for Indigenous individuals to speak on their perspectives and worldviews.

Educational Inequality

As a result of a history of colonization, as well as historical and contemporary discrimination, Indigenous persons face significantly more barriers to education and consequentially, experience more instances of leaving school early (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAH], 2017, p. 1). Although, some improvements have been made, this gap persists despite ongoing efforts of elimination (Gerber, 2014, p. 121). Statistics Canada (2017) has outlined the general improvements of educational rates of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) individuals aged 25-64 in regard to their overall educational attainment from 2006-2016 (p. 7-8). Within those 10 years, First Nation individuals experienced an increase in high school graduation rates, apprentice certificates, college diplomas and bachelor's degrees or higher with a decrease in the category of no certificate, diploma or degree (Statistics Canada, 2017, p. 7-8). Despite educational improvements, the gap between FNMI and the non-Indigenous population persists. Of particular note, on-reserve First Nation individuals with registered Indian status [status], face disproportionately more barriers and this is reflected in lower completion rates whereas those individuals with registered Indian status living off reserve fared better in educational completion (Statistics Canada, 2017, p. 8). For example, in terms of post-secondary education in the same time period [2006-2016], among off-reserve status FN individuals, 11.4% of this population received bachelor's degrees while 5.4% of status on-reserve FN individuals achieved the same credential (Statistics Canada, 2017,

p. 8). To that end, varying levels of inequality persist within the FNMI population, including an individual's on or off reserve status.

Barriers to Education

Indigenous students face considerable barriers in education. Canada's history of residential schooling set the tone for present-day Indigenous education. In addition, during this time, FN individuals who did decide to pursue postsecondary education, following residential schooling, faced mandatory disenfranchisement of status rights as per the Indian Act (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 48; The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005, p. 6).[5] Contemporary researchers continue to draw parallels between this original interaction with the educational sector and today's current system of education.

Western education is often referred to as a means of continued assimilation and oppression that maintains the interest of mainstream society (Milne, 2016, p. 69; Bruce et al., 2012, p. 48; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 95). Social reproduction theory aligns with this assertion as educational institutions are viewed as maintaining the interest of certain people, generally students of higher SES backgrounds, possessing specific traits and characteristics (white middle class) as well as valued forms of cultural capital and higher-class habitus. Within social reproduction, particular backgrounds are rewarded within the educational sector – a system that reproduces inequality. Wotherspoon (2002, p. 12) further describes contemporary education as:

> A paradoxical status for many Aboriginal people. It has figured prominently in their historical subordination and marginalization relative to other Canadians, yet it is looked upon as a central vehicle for successful integration into mainstream and self-governed enterprises.

[5] According to The Indian Act of 1876, status Indians had to give up their rights if they wanted to pursue post-secondary education which is a prime example of assimilationist practices (The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005, p. 6).

The relationship between Indigenous people and education is loaded and intricate, revealing criticism and distrust on behalf of the Indigenous population. Bruce et al. (2012) expressed a similar sentiment, by stating that colonization, assimilation practices of residential schools, and relentless racism "lingers in the forms of distrust" and these feelings are passed down from parents to children (p. 48). Colonization, residential schooling, and racism are associated with risk factors and barriers to education (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 48). Assimilationist practices have equated to the Indigenous population facing unique barriers in areas of education, employment, housing and health (Milne, 2016, p. 67).

Addressing educational barriers is integral to understanding the educational gap between Indigenous learners and non-Indigenous learners. Indigenous learners disproportionately face barriers in all facets of life. Lower levels of education cause a ripple effect in terms of economic, employment, and health inequality (Milne, 2016, p. 67), which further inhibits the betterment of this population on these levels. Poverty is endemic across FN populations (Gerber, 2014, p. 124). Addressing educational barriers, including the systemic elements associated with it, is key.

Aside from the work that has been done, continued work is necessary in order regularly highlight and provide suggestions on alleviating educational barriers, specifically at it relates to Indigenous populations (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 7). Barriers to education include social and cultural barriers, institutional barriers, financial barriers, geographical barriers, and personal barriers (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 5-6). These barriers often overlap, compounding inequality. Individuals who are economically underprivileged have much less valued forms of cultural capital in comparison to those who are in a better and stable financial standing (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017, p. 130; Bourdieu, 1977). Those who have higher SES and more valued forms of cultural capital succeed disproportionately in educational institutions and consequentially their favoured positionality is replicated (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017, p. 130; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

According to Bruce et al., (2012), "dysfunctional communities, lack of role models, language differences, peer pressure, and lack of family and community support are perceived by Aboriginal people as larger barriers to successful education and employment outcomes than they are by their non-Aboriginal counterparts" (p. 49). In the Indigenous context, barriers to education also include negative feelings at school as their relationships with teachers and their peers are often based on a "perceived expectation of failure; school policies and pedagogical practices are designed to guarantee their failure" (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 47). In addition, Indigenous students are often guided to low-level courses that do not coincide with educational and employment aspirations and this systematically disadvantages students (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 7). Indigenous learners often experience socioeconomic barriers such as family obligations and travel costs associated with traveling back and forth from their home communities (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 20). Adult learners are also often tasked with family responsibilities, which has been cited as a significant reason for leaving school prematurely (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 50). In terms of post-secondary education, FN students may be eligible for band funding but because of the increased number of band funding applicants, more students are being denied annually; those who are accepted quickly realize that funding is not enough to cover financial responsibilities and necessities (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 51).

Barriers to education stem from structural inequality where particular factors, such as economic, cultural, and social capital, dictate who will do well within the educational system. If a person does not possess these forms of capital, they will likely not succeed within the educational system as the educational system is not value free; they will not possess the 'higher class' habitus that is necessary to conventional educational success. As mentioned, barriers to education and succeeding in education are correlated. Possessing the correct forms of cultural capital is determinative of educational success. Some would argue that this is unfair as individuals who enter the educational system have a pre-determined path (Stuber, 2011, p. 10; Bourdieu [1977] 1990). Mainstream society is unaware of this and therefore, place blame on

those who mis-perform educationally (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017, p. 47). This can attribute to educators holding discriminatory views on those who do not do well in their studies. This idea that 'natural aptitudes' dictate success and failure, is often equated at an individual level as internalization of self-criticism and defeat, a term that Bourdieu has coined as 'symbolic violence' (Wotherspoon, 2015, p. 84). Students may feel that they are to blame for leaving school early. Ultimately, viewing educational success and failure without adequate recognition of the systemic inequalities is criticized, and rightfully so. As a result of these many barriers, educational pathways for the Indigenous population are varied and often do not follow clear linear progression.

Returning to education as an adult is often associated with increasing socioeconomic status and upwards social mobility (Drewes & Meredith, 2015, p. 3). In terms of those who do choose to return to school as an adult learner, many are formerly educated and want to increase their education and SES (Drewes & Meredith, 2015, p. 9). The remaining adult learners are those who returned to school for the same reasons but left school prematurely due to class and race-based issues. Ultimately, adult learners are looking to advance themselves.

When individuals leave school early, that is not to say that they will not return and achieve their educational aspirations. Early school leavers may leave school for a variety of reasons and on many occasions before they complete their educational goals. Auchinachie and Bowe (2017) state that "such learners often will enter, exist, and re-enter upgrading programs before completing" (p. 1). Many early school leavers who exit secondary educational institutions before they are 19, will often return and complete high school by 20-24 years of age (White, 2013, p. 7). FNMI most often leave school prematurely, as well as those who come from rural areas and specific immigrant populations (White, 2013, p. 7). Adult learners tend to increase their secondary education level to meet post-secondary educational requirements (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017, p. 1). The time it takes to upgrade education [upgrading] may vary in accordance to responsibilities related to employment and family; issues related to learning (challenges and

disabilities) also have an effect on upgrading times (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017, p. 1). These varied pathways that don't often end with the same outcome may also influence definitions of success.

Critical Conceptions of Success

The term success is problematic as it fails to encapsulate integral aspects of Indigenous worldviews. In education, the concept is often defined in relation to the high school completion rate (CCL, 2007, p. 8). This common indicator is harmful as it fails to regard social, economic, and political factors while simultaneously placing blame on the individual for failing to complete their education (CCL, 2007, p. 8). The Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development [OECD] (2017) states that:

> There is a widespread concern among Indigenous scholars and community advocates about loss of language, the importance of language and cultural preservation and revitalization, and a desire to see greater social harmony, anti-racist sentiment and cultural respect (CCL, 2007). Indigenous research also points to identity, wisdom and traditions as critical in shaping identity and character, and sustaining deep relationships between kin, land and water. In the face of such contrasts, it might be supposed, that a clear choice needs to endorse a focus either on attainment gaps or on broader more humanistic, holistic concerns. (p. 28).

This perspective puts forth the common dichotomy that is carried out within research in regard to whether the focus should be on educational gaps or broader more humanistic, holistic concerns. In order to address educational disparities, as per the importance placed on education from the Indigenous community, these broad holistic concerns need to be addressed simultaneously. This is the very location that success needs to be thoroughly addressed with an exploration of the concept that encompasses Indigenous values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Success for Indigenous students might be characterized in accordance to the varied barriers that were discussed previously. For example, because of said barriers, Indigenous students may have irregular attendance and not do well in their courses. Consequentially, success for Indigenous students may be characterized as attending classes regularly among

meeting other conventional expectations (Wishart, 2009, p. 473). Wishart (2009) addresses success in her study on Indigenous urban youth:

> For some students just coming to school on a regular basis is success. And we let them know that as well. Coming to school on time is success. Not fighting in school… success. You know even if they just come here for one or two terms and then have a different way of looking at the world, are able to cooperate with each other, that's success. And then they move onto other programs and that's just fine. And that happens as well (p. 473).

Success is varied within the Indigenous community. It can mean a host of things dependent on the individual – this sentiment is in direct relation to the point made earlier, that the group is not homogenous in nature. A person's life experience impacts how they conceptualize the term success. An Indigenous individual may view success more holistically in comparison to another Indigenous individual who may view it more closely to mainstream notions. It is likely that the term is conceptualized in varied ways among the population but what is clear is that there have been some criticisms stemming from the current common notions of success.

Calls for the Redefinition of the Term Success

Research suggests that success for the Indigenous population is more complex than common understandings of this term that focus primarily on increasing SES and elevating oneself in the employment sector (Gallop & Bastien, 2016, p. 206). Success, in this sense, is not conducive to the Indigenous experience. This problematization has resulted in calls to address this gap in knowledge.

The CCL (2007) advocates for the redefinition of success to something that is central to the Indigenous community (p. 3). Alternatively, Diane Wishart's (2009) study, which was addressed earlier, focused on contemporary meanings of success for a specified demographic. This study calls for further discussion on what academic success may mean for Indigenous learners, something that utilizes a holistic approach, as this can help close the educational gap and positively affect success rates (p. 479). Other scholars have called for a revamping of the term by means of "broadening the definitions for success, as well as the frameworks for

measuring success" (Auchinachie & Bowe, 2017, p. 14). What can be gathered from the literature is that there is some criticism regarding the term in Indigenous contexts. Some scholars call for an exploration of the term while others note that the word is not encompassing from an Indigenous standpoint. This project explores and engages with success from the conceptualizations of participants in this study. Research on this subject matter is essential for everyone, including Indigenous students, policy makers, educators, and society alike.

Holistic Understandings of Success

Holistic learning involves "engaging the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions, for First Nations, Inuit and Métis" (CCL, 2007, p. 2). According to the Canadian Council on Learning [CCL] (2009), relationships involving the self, family, individual, community, nation, and all of creation are integral to Indigenous learning (p. 5). The development and maintenance of these relationships, based on trust and shared values, are the basis of the concept – social capital (CCL, 2007, p. 5).

Social capital in an Indigenous perspective "entails networks and community relationships, and as a means of reintegrating Aboriginal people's connection to nature and the land" (CCL, 2007, p. 5). This perspective on social capital correlates to other sociological work. For Bourdieu, social capital is a network of relations that has been regarded as capital that can be institutionalized in titles, such as titles of nobility (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). In addition, social capital is recognized as a means that can be utilized within social relationships (Stuber, 2011, p. 10). The holistic aspect of Indigenous learning, including an emphasis on social capital are suggested areas of importance to the development of the concept 'success'. As it currently stands, the term success is criticized as there is a lack of recognition to Indigenous lifelong learning, holistic learning, and experiential learning.

In order to further develop what success may mean to this community, it is important to provide opportunities for participants to provide insight on integral aspects of their learning experience, both in and outside the classroom. The OECD (2017) states:

> In addressing the meaning of success, we would emphasize that it is not about privileging one worldview at the expense of another, but rather of properly recognizing Indigenous cultures, values, and perspectives while laying the foundations for young Indigenous students to be able to participate actively in the wider society and economy and the global world (to walk in both worlds). We have stressed the need to address the harsh and often stubborn gaps in such dimensions as participation, engagement, and achievement, while at the same time problematizing these gaps and focusing on positive measures that build on strengths (p. 29).

Ultimately, it is important to delve deeper into Indigenous conceptualizations of success as a means of creating a more equitable society for Indigenous learners. Defining success is not about privileging one world view over another. It is about recognizing that Indigenous learners may view success differently, and in order to support these differences in conceptualization, studies such as this one, can provide appropriate Indigenous insights.

Supporting Indigenous Success

Programs geared toward early leavers and students with different educational pathways, such as ABE programming, provide additional supports. As a result, Indigenous students may be more likely to achieve contemporary educational success in these programs. In addition, exploring participants perceptions on the ABE institution(s) that they did attend provides insight on whether these education centers are supporting success within an Indigenous perspective, regardless of support level. It is important to further the discussion on central tenets of theory utilized in this study.

Cultural capital is a form of capital related to education, behaviour, knowledge, and an individual's overall finesse (Bourdieu, 1986; Stuber, 2001, p. 10). Further, cultural capital has been recognized as a "system of symbolic cues that social actors use to regulate access to places and positions – a determinant of being part of the group" (Stuber, 2011, p. 10). It is acquired through family socialization and it is handed down by generation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990,

p. 45). All individuals have cultural capital; however, there are valued forms and those that are better positioned in society (white middle class) are who inherit it. Students who have an abundance of 'correct' cultural capital are advantaged in their educational pursuits compared to those who do not, as they are just beginning to understand the "culture of education" (Stuber, 2011, p. 10).

Habitus has been expressed as sort of 'membership to a community', for example, language, particularly conveying oneself in a socially desirable way, will allow an individual membership (Jenks, 2005, p. 130). Those in the higher echelons of society hold the highly valued forms of habitus and as aforementioned, are those that attain cultural capital naturally through familial linkages (Jenks, 2005, p. 128). This is the very location where the educational system is criticized as those without the dominant form of habitus are at a disadvantage. Jenks (2005, p. 131) posits:

> If educational institutions are judging, assessing and processing people according to their habitus, whether consciously or unconsciously, then they are testing people on things that they have not taught them. The curriculum is not a level playing field.

Specific populations, based on class and racial categories, are at a particular disadvantage. The educational field is not value free, as the institution favours the dominant class and their habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Jenks, 2005, p. 128-129). In other words, students begin school in stratified positions, and arguably, this is the location where many Indigenous students begin. The education as it stands, is viewed as perpetuating the status quo.

The Indigenous population does not always hold these valued forms of cultural capital and habitus. A clear example of this is the manner in which educational systems operate as they are not representative of Indigenous traditional learning and knowledge keeping (Indigenous cultural capital). Mainstream educational institutions operate under western ideals of education. The interaction between social class and overall experience within the educational system may differ between educational institutions that have varying missions that cater to differences such as racial minorities and adult students (Perna, 2013, p. 226-227). This thesis

allows for a broad overview of whether ABE programming that caters to a large Indigenous population, differs from mainstream educational centres in terms of valuing Indigenous cultural capital. In addition, if ABE programs understand and recognize that Indigenous peoples may have alternative definitions of success, they can better support these understandings which will consequently positively influence Indigenous educational completion rates.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Positioning Myself in the Research

It is important to position myself in the research as a means of aligning my work with central tenets of Indigenous methodology. My mother is a Cree woman from Waterhen Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan. She has spent all of her formative years on-reserve but has been living and working off-reserve for the past decade. My dad is a self-identifying Métis man who is from the same territory. I am registered to Waterhen Lake First Nation as a band member and have spent more than half of my life living on-reserve until I left to pursue higher education and employment.

As a First Nations woman, I have experienced many barriers to education, which has allowed me to identify with the participants in many ways. I am a first-generation post-secondary educated graduate. Prior to my mother returning to school as an adult, my parents left school very prematurely (middle school years). My mother eventually went on to graduate high school as an adult learner and pursued some post-secondary classes. I grew up remote, in a low-income household, and within a very large family, including extended relations. I have lived for extended periods of time with no running water and when I did get it, it was not potable. Throughout my youth, I went to several schools, because my family dynamic led us to do so.

In terms of academics, I did very well, often the top of my class until I began high school. In high school, I worked full-time to provide necessities and material items for myself and my education suffered immensely. I did graduate on time and went on to pursue post-secondary education, but I did not do well and had my band funding discontinued as a result. I struggled with confidence issues in education (imposter syndrome) which led me to leaving university early. After working for a few years, I was financially able to return to school. With newfound support, I was able to graduate within four years and then went on to apply and enter graduate school immediately after.

Narrative Inquiry

This thesis utilizes a narrative methodology. It has been stated that narrative inquiry can be used when it comes to Indigenous researchers who aspire to "make meaning from a story" (Kovach, 2009, p. 98). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state "the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives; the study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the how humans experience the world" (p. 2). There is value to understanding socially storied lives, especially when it comes to research conducted in an Indigenous context.

Narrative research is based on balancing power differentials between the researcher and those participating as researched. Aside from Indigenous methodologies valuing narrative methods, feminism, specifically, and social sciences generally, also shares a similar sentiment when it comes to prioritizing a power-balanced methodology that encapsulates prioritization of participant wellbeing (Riessman, 2000, p. 2-3). Riessman (2005) states that "embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and 'get a life' by telling and writing their stories (Langellier, 2001)" (p. 1). Creating space is just one part of empowering individuals to speak, particularly in relation to those who have long been silenced and may struggle with the idea of partaking in research (Riessman, 2005, p. 4). Butler-Kisber (2010) states:

> of more concern is the observance of ethical practices throughout the research process that attend to the relational nature of the work, the positioning of the researcher in the inquiry, and that focus on issues of power and voice" (p. 17).

Ultimately, from a narrative standpoint, power and voice are of central concern within the research process.

These areas of contentment are also integral to Indigenous methodology. After spending time conducting research on appropriate ways to handle academic work in an Indigenous context, narrative methods appeared to align well with Indigenous methodologies. At this point,

this thesis adopted central tenets of Indigenous methodology. Utilizing a narrative methodology makes sense, when it comes to producing work that aligns with Indigenous principles. Researchers have agreed with this sentiment as "narratives function as an intergenerational knowledge transfer… as knowledge and story are inseparable" (Kovach, 2009, p. 95).

It is first important to delve into the central components of Indigenous methodology. Indigenous methodology is a growing field and academics have been devoting their scholarship to its advancement. However, conducting research within an Indigenous epistemology and methodology is often difficult because it is a growing academic area with limited informative materials (Kovach, 2009, p. 128). Central tenets of relationality, reciprocity, trust and respect are central to Indigenous methods. In addition, having deep understandings of protocol is especially important; an example of protocol is the provisioning of offerings, particularly tobacco from a Cree perspective (Kovach, 2009, p. 127). What sets Indigenous methodology apart from contemporary methodology is that it is "bound in ceremony, spirit, land, place, nature, relationship, language, dreams, honour, purpose, and stories in an inexplicable, holistic way that honours tribal knowledges" (Kovach, 2009, p. 140). Core values are what make up Indigenous methodology.

Central Components of Indigenous Methodology

I incorporate many of the central components of Indigenous methodology into my work. These include balancing power differentials, relational accountability, self-location, and core research responsibilities. These areas will be addressed in the subsequent subsections.

Balancing Power Differentials

From an Indigenous methodology approach, the balancing of power differentials is a central component to conducting research within an Indigenous context. This is part of the reason that contemporary methods work so well. Kovach (2009) states:

> Highly structured interviews are not congruent with accessing knowledges that imbue both the fluidity and regulation of the storyteller's role within oral tradition, or that respond to the relational nature of Indigenous research… Given the extractive, exploitive history of research within Indigenous communities, efforts to mitigate power differentials in all aspects of research are warranted, whether using an Indigenous methodological approach or not (p. 123-125).

It is especially important to prioritize the balancing of power differentials within an Indigenous context given the exploitive history of Canada and Indigenous peoples.

Relationality and Negotiating Entry

Relational accountability is central to Indigenous methodology. Wilson (2001) has stated that as a researcher, "you are answering to all your relations" with key questions of "how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship?" and "what are my obligations to this research?" (p. 177). Relational accountability gets down to the overall integrity of the researcher – whether research is conducted in the best interests of those being researched. Wilson (2001) posits:

> The axiology or morals need to be an integral part of the methodology so that when I am gaining knowledge, I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the research relationship. This becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to all my relations (p. 177).

To negotiate entry, relational accountability is absolutely integral to researchers who wish to align themselves with an Indigenous methodology.

As part of this research project, I emphasized the aspect of negotiating entry into the community that I would do a majority of my research. I reached out to the Tribal Council[6] through telephone and email in regard to asking for permission to come in and conduct research. I am a member of this Tribal Council and I have worked for the Tribal Council directly

[6] Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada states that a "Tribal Council is a grouping of bands, (bands as defined by the *Indian Act*), with common interests who voluntarily join together to provide advisory and/or program services to member bands. Tribal Councils are mandated by band councils to deliver advisory services for which funding is provided. Advisory services are defined as the provision to member bands of specific knowledge, expertise and/or assistance in the following fields: band government, financial management, community planning, technical services and economic development" (2019, n.p).

in the past. Despite my connection to the area, I asked for permission and ensured that my presence was known, including my intentions.

Insider status is much more complex than one would think – a biological tie does not equate to insider status to the community but rather other factors such as connections to the land itself (geography), cultural and language connections, as well as social engagement are all integral to truly being an insider (Champagne, 2015, p. 70). Champagne (2015) states:

> Indigenous researchers should consider themselves outsiders to all Indigenous communities that are not their own and pay strict attention to ethical and tribal protocols. Tribes have their own way of knowing, and are sometimes not familiar with specific tribal traditions, Indigenous worldviews, or tribal rights, history, and cultural contexts; before entering a tribal community, it is necessary to learn as much as possible about the culture and issues confronting that community, especially if they are relevant to a research program (p. 71-72).

In addition, there is an emphasis on asking for permission to enter into Indigenous territory for the purposes of research and engagement. Champagne (2015) states:

> it is an act of respect and recognition of Indigenous understandings of territory, self-government, and continuing tribal relations to their land and their spirituality to seek permission from tribal peoples, organizations, and federally non-recognized Indian communities. Indigenous researchers and Indigenous studies departments should provide the highest standards of respect for Indigenous rights and lived presence by extending the courtesy of seeking research permission, protecting Indigenous interests, and contributing toward the fulfillment of Indigenous goals and values" (p. 68-69).

Negotiating entry has been commonly expressed in terms of ethics; researchers need to understand this practice as a responsibility to pursuing ethics in their research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). Negotiating entry is one of the many aspects of relationship building between researcher and participant.

Self-Location

Self-location is an important aspect of engaging in a reciprocal relationship with the participants. As defined by Kovach (2009):

> Within Indigenous research, self-location means cultural identification, and it manifests itself in various ways. Indigenous researchers will situate themselves as being of an Indigenous group, be it tribal, urban, or otherwise. They will share their experience with

> culture, and/or they will identify the Indigenous epistemology (or epistemologies) of their research. Often, they will culturally locate in all three ways (p. 110).

I was able to ensure self-location by speaking of my own experiences prior to each interview. I established self-location by dedicating approximately 10 minutes prior to each interview to be vulnerable and speak to educational memories that resonated with me, including information that spoke to my general upbringing, experiential hardships, and cultural identification. By doing so, I did risk creating a bias within the interview by essentially steering the interview to topics that I would like to engage in. However, I feel that the ends justify the means. I was able to establish a closer connection and a safe space. I was able to create that safety that comes with establishing a closer relationship with the individuals that I have engaged with.

An established relationship opens the door to participants feeling that they can also share things that they may not have done in the first place. Participants often spoke to sensitive topics and made me aware that they were not comfortable sharing but wanted to share despite my interjections of subject change or other methods of de-escalating the emotional harm such as taking a break. Ultimately, self-location is essential as it "allows the participant to situate and assess the researcher's motivations for research, thus beginning the relationship that is elemental to story-based methodology" (Kovach, 2009, p. 98).

Responsibilities

Researchers who wish to conduct research in an Indigenous context have responsibilities in regard to voice and representation of their participants (Kovach, 2009, p. 96). Researchers need to treat their transcripts accordingly, with respect to responsibilities. To do this, researchers must ensure that participants are actively engaged with the research process by way of reviewing their transcripts to ensure appropriate allowances of the material and a thorough understanding of the retraction process. Participants need to know their rights when it comes to their knowledge and truths (narrative information passed to me). I ensured that participants

were thoroughly aware of this throughout the process. I expected some participants to engage in passage retraction, but this was not the case.

Researchers are also responsible for recognizing the impact that their results have and how they may unintentionally be harmful. Research needs to prioritize the voices of the marginalized and it also needs to be aligned with community needs (Kovach, 2009, p. 101). Results that are not aligned with the community needs, but instead, serve to reinforce stereotypes, are not conducive to good research. Indigenous academics have brought in elements of their language and worldview into their research, such as utilizing the term *tapwe*[7] (truth) as a guiding mechanism of interpreting and valuing their participants stories, and as a means of producing decolonized research (Kovach, 2009, p. 103). Indigenous researchers consistently prioritize values of integrity, respect and reciprocity as a means of conducting research within Indigenous communities; this shows a respect for all Indigenous peoples, including past and present relations (Kovach, 2009, p. 111).

The participants in my study are deeply valued. I perceived their stories as truth and knowledge that they have proceeded to pass to me in a reciprocal relationship. Each interview was held to the highest regard, from our initial interactions to our engagements over soup and buns, among other foods, to my interaction with their transcripts and coded material. In addition, as aforementioned, narratives allow for the balancing of power differentials, as participants have the autonomy to speak on what is important to them and ultimately, holding power of their truths and knowledge in the form of story (Kovach, 2009, p. 99).

Participant Information and Profiles

The target population for this thesis originally was self-identified First Nation individuals, over the age of 25, and previous attendees of an ABE program as a result of their

[7] *Tapwe* is a Cree term defined as truth.

early leaver history. As interviews were underway, I was very flexible and receptive when it came to individuals approaching me to tell their stories. It was a part of my view on engaging in ethical research as a First Nations person entering into First Nation research. I was approached by an elder, named Armand, prior to the interview stage of this project. He wished to speak on his own experiences by way of providing guidance and also benefiting him as he wished to tell his oral story, and have it recorded. Although he was not part of the intended sample, his spoken word adds value to this project, which is why it is included in the research. Aside from this, another individual who identified as Métis, approached me and asked me to be a part of this project. I originally told this person that I appreciated her interest, but she had not met the requirements that I had set out. After reflecting on our conversation, I considered her unique educational past and experiences within the educational system, particularly her on-reserve school past, and I believed that she would be a good candidate for this project. I have included a participation information profile in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Participants

Name*	Age	Education Status	Education Status	Self-Identity
Glenda	26	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate; Post-Secondary Graduate	First Nations
Juliette	27	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate	First Nations
Jessie	30s	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate	First Nations
Karnella	40	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate; Some Post-Secondary	First Nations
Jade	43	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate; Post-Secondary Graduate	First Nations
Erika	55	Off-Reserve	GED; Master's Graduate	First Nations & Norwegian
Danielle	30	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate; Post-Secondary Graduate	Métis & Aboriginal
Lee	36	Off-Reserve	ABE Graduate; Post-Secondary Graduate	Anishinaabe & First Nations
Troy	48	On/off reserve	ABE Graduate; Post-Secondary Graduate	First Nations
Kevin	36	-	Some ABE	First Nations
Armand (Elder)	72	Residential Schools	Left Residential School; on the job training and learning within the community	First Nations

* Participant names include genuine names and pseudonyms. Distinctions will not be made for the purposes of identity protection.

Participants were between the ages of 26 and 72 years. The average age of participation was approximately 40 years. I purposely included individuals who have completed ABE and those who have not, as there is value speaking to people from both categories. I was trying to recruit self-identified First Nations individuals as previous research has suggested that it is a challenge to address particular identities within the categorization of Indigenous peoples. I felt that my insider status could allow me to recruit this specific population easier than others. As mentioned before, I included one Métis individual because of her specific circumstances and history as well as engaging in my own ethical practices of honouring the wishes of research participants. I also did not place limits on on/off reserve status. I felt that limiting my target group would prolong the recruitment process and it may have impacted my overall sample size. I found that a majority of my participants have engaged in both on and off reserve school systems; this may have impacted their likelihood to participate in this research project as they have been exposed to different educational experiences from those who attended on-reserve schools strictly.

As noted previously, the subject of power dynamics, particularly balancing power differentials is central to this thesis. As part of empowering individuals, I made a case to the ethics department to allow participants the possibility of using their genuine names, although I did strongly encourage the use of pseudonyms. The reason I placed an emphasis on allowing participants to use their genuine names was to respect Indigenous worldviews of viewing personal stories as knowledge and truth. The belief system that oral stories are attributed to knowledge in Indigenous worldviews means that it should be treated with the same respect and integrity that knowledges produced and disseminated in academic institutions have. Through this outlook, participants were respected by having the option of attributing their name to their story and some participants did wish to do this. The individuals who partook in this research include a mixture of both genuine names and pseudonyms and this will not be made apparent

for identity protection. Ultimately, some individuals want to be recognized for their stories and therefore do not want to be represented anonymously (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 17).

In the midst of engaging with participants, I was often invited to informal settings, such as homes and restaurants, to share food and visit before and during interviews. I established relationships at this point in time and the strength of one particular relationship is prevalent when I was entrusted to provide transportation for the daughter of one of the interviewees. I sat with participants as they periodically engaged with their children in bouts of parenting and rule enforcing while we interviewed. The informal setting allowed participants to feel at home (literally, for some), while we engaged in what is most often treated as a formal event (interview process). I offered words of encouragement as I heard stories of perseverance and resilience. I was appreciated and this was especially prevalent when I was repeatedly told that I helped them more than they could have helped me.

The interview process was considered a therapeutic and positive experience for them, particularly when they spoke of sensitive subjects that they do not generally discuss so freely. I witnessed healing through the story telling process – a type of medicine for participants. We took moments of silence to regroup through complicated retellings of difficult times. We took time to speak of our connections whether that be through our siblings, cousins, mothers, or other extended relations. We spoke of relations stemming back from generations ago, in one case. I took the time to share some of my own personal stories. I connected in ways that I could. One participant spoke about not having running water, and she knew that I could relate to that. Our conversation would often include phrases such as "you would understand" or "don't you remember what it was like?" Participants spoke of locations that I have previously had direct association with (on-reserve school). I felt like after an interview, that participants invited me into their hearts; I got to know them on another level. I gained knowledge on what was important to them, including personal hardships, stories of perseverance, goals, dreams and possibilities, as well as hopes for their children and extended relations.

Interview Details

Interviews ranged between 1.5 hours and 2.5 hours in length. I accommodated each and every participant to the best of my ability. This meant that I traveled to various First Nation communities, including other small cities. I visited band offices, frequented personal homes, and met in restaurants. Unintentionally, I conducted two interviews at my home via telephone and video chat as two participants asked me to interview them on short notice. I ensured that I could cater to their requests even though it deviated from my intention of interviewing strictly face-to-face as part of my relationship building strategy. I did plan on recruiting participants through a specific ABE institution, but that fell through because of unforeseen challenges related to timeliness. Because of this unintended situation, I opened up recruitment to any individual who met the other requirements, with a past of attending any ABE institution. A majority of the participants attended two specific ABE programs.

Another unintended recruitment outcome was that most of the participants asked me to participate in the project. I had shared a recruitment poster online and through my home community's online social engagement page. When I visited the band office, some of my relations asked me about my project so I engaged in conversation with them about it. By speaking about my project, other people learned about what I was doing and shared the information with their community connections, so I had a relatively easy time collecting data. It would have been a lot easier if I lived closer to where I collected data. The final unintended recruitment outcome, as mentioned previously, was that two participants gained Indian Status (under the Indian Act) later in life (teenager years; thirties) who originally identified as Métis and mixed ancestry, respectively. Participants freely spoke about their educational journeys including their general lives from their earliest memories to their present-day realities. Included in their discussions was an emphasis on educational pathways and how they conceptualized success in their lives.

Transcription and Analysis

Interviews were transcribed using the application *Dragon Naturally Speaking*. This app sped up the transcription process, and I was able to transcribe interviews in a timely manner. I had to read out the interviews to ensure accuracy as the app did not transcribe very well, and it did not account for punctuation. I was aware of the majority of the Cree words that were used and the others, I had to ask fluent Cree speakers for clarification. The program made the transcription process easier and less time consuming.

Following the transcription process, I began coding utilizing the 'manifest coding' technique. Manifest coding refers to the practice of coding what is said, rather than how it is said. Themes were pulled from the material under the research questions. I address the central themes in the following empirical chapters.

Chapter 5: Early School Leavers and Educational Barriers[8]

This chapter addresses the first question that guides this research: What factors contributed to the educational pathways of FNM early education leavers? To get to the root of this question, participants discussed the varied factors that led them to leaving school initially, as well as subsequent attempts. Probes were used as necessary, including: What made it hard to keep going to school? and Were you experiencing any problems during this time when you left school? Participants spoke on the time(s) that they left school and what circumstances they were dealing with during that period. Data was coded and placed into the following themes: (1) issues fitting in; (2) facing negative inaccurate perceptions; and (3) fulfilling familial financial and care obligations. Each theme will be addressed as a subsection within this chapter.

Not Fitting In

Indigenous participants reflected on how they did not fit in when they attended off-reserve schooling. They perceived their negative experiences of not fitting in as being fueled by racism and class differences. This ultimately led to feelings of mistrust and disrespect of the educational system. Participants felt acutely aware of not fitting in while attending their mainstream secondary schools. In light of the sensitive topics addressed in relation to race, class, and overall maltreatment, names will be omitted for the protection of the participants' identities within this specific section area.

Within the data, there is evidence of schooling privileging certain identities over others, which consequently translated to feelings of not fitting in within the education sector. As mentioned earlier, cultural capital goes hand in hand with established class status; the educational field systematically privileges some while disadvantaging others (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). Students were hyper aware of their identity not being valued when they attended school.

[8] Appendix A includes a chart on summary findings

Participants largely felt segregated from other students, disrespected in school, and not supported by their educators. One participant addressed her experiences of not fitting in:

> In high school, you're constantly being judged on how you look…your skin colour. It's sad to say but the white people would hang out with the white people and the brown people with the brown. With my skin, going into high school, I felt like I didn't belong in some way because the other students made you feel that way. I'm not sure why they did that though. You would look at their group and you wouldn't actually see a brown person there, maybe the odd one… I guess it would also come with people who had money too, right. If you looked poor or came from a poor family, you're automatically an outcast to them. So yeah, that was one of the reasons why I stopped going [to school].

In terms of not fitting in, this particular participant explicitly stated that her race had been a barrier to her education, which ultimately influenced her decision to leave school early. Feelings of judgement and segregation within mainstream education negatively impacted her educational experience. In addition, this participant also felt that "looking poor", which equates to SES, was another determinant of what factored in to belonging at school. The NCCAH (2017) state that "overt and subconscious racism and discrimination by classmates and by teachers can contribute to feelings of not belonging or a diminished sense of identity and self-worth, thus exacerbating the problem of low academic achievement for Indigenous learners" (p. 3). In school, instances of racism largely negatively affected the participants and their educational pursuits.

In some occasions, feelings of not fitting in emerged early, notably within the elementary and middle school years. Racial segregation was also noted as something that was blatant and problematic within the educational sector. She stated:

> I moved mid-year grade 8 to the city and it was all white people. I felt like I was always disrespected, and I hated it. I had no choice but to go to school and I remember always playing sick… There was so much that I didn't like about school… the divisions. What I mean when I say divisions is that the minorities and native peoples were divided [from everyone else]. There was not much to like there [at school]. [I didn't like] the racism, the teachers, the misuse of authority and that's something that seemed constant throughout my time.

This participant perceived her experience of not fitting in as a racial issue. Feeling disrespected at school appeared to be a constant in her life and this ultimately led her to playing sick –

missing school, rather than attending and learning with other classmates. She also had distrust of the authority figures at school, as she felt like there was a constant misuse of authority.

Racism appeared to be a major factor of not fitting in at school. When asked if he had fit in at school, this participant reacted matter-of-factly and without hesitation and said "Did I fit in at school? NO! I was the brown folk!" This particular participant reacted to my question in a manner that implied surprise and misbelief in regard to why I would ask such a question as he felt that it was a given; it appeared as though he felt that I should be aware that there was no chance that he would fit in. He then went on to state why he did not like school:

> Racism, definitely the racism. I was going to school with rich people's kids. I was the lowest of the low. They were the highest of the high because they have all this money and here, I am scraping for welfare… we were the exact opposite. They were the Môniyâwak[9]… [I didn't like the] teachers. The teachers always picked on me. I definitely didn't like them. They set you up to fail. They loved putting me in the spot light. [Indigenous last name stated] … they made fun of my last name a lot growing up.

He was confident that his race and low SES were why he did not fit in at school – this had separated him from others, others that he asserted were meant to be there (white middle class). He also attributed his negative feelings toward the educational system stemming from his adverse engagements with his teachers as his Indigenous name was often ridiculed publicly. This participant was definitely aware of the racism as he specifically identified it as a barrier to his education.

Being visibly Indigenous appeared to be an influential factor regarding whether or not participants had fit in at school. Several participants were quick to address that they had been the subject of bullying – this negatively affected feelings of fitting in and was often dictated as a resonating factor of early school leaver status. One individual addressed her ostracism that occurred when she was a young child in a mainstream elementary school. She stated:

> We were the only native people, so we got bullied a lot and that was part of the reason why I left [school]. I decided I'll be done it [school] and just do it through correspondence and get my education at some point. If people were native there, they didn't show it, as in they didn't look it. We didn't have that commonality. There were

[9] Môniyâwak: Cree term denoting white men; non-Indian people

> kids that would call me names, and it was difficult. The hardest part was not being supported by school staff as teachers would hear it or see it and they wouldn't do anything about it so, I felt bad. Actually, in some ways, it made me stronger…

She felt that the teachers in her school did not come to her defense when she had experienced racial torment from her peers, and this inevitably influenced her decision to leave school at an early age. These findings are supported by Milne (2016) who found that among Indigenous Ontario youth, those who looked more visibly native experienced higher instances of maltreatment by their peers and were also treated unfairly by teachers (p. 73). She felt that teachers could have stepped in and handled the racialized bullying that she encountered rather than turning a 'blind eye' to it. This sentiment is in line with Hare and Pidgeon (2011), as they found that "the consequences [of racism] can be observed in low self-esteem, negative attitudes, and interactions with peers and teachers and early school exit" (p. 96).

Participants had many examples of not fitting in. Questions on this subject matter were easy to answer as interviewees had many memories that resonated with them. An interviewee spoke about her negative experience in elementary school:

> We were neglected children. Our hands were dirty, our face… we were in dirty clothes. In the beginning of grade 6, I remember my one teacher who I really liked, I thought she was a really neat teacher. She sent me to the bathroom to clean my fingernails because they were so dirty and that was so embarrassing and degrading to me. She picked me out of a group of 30 students and said to me, "you have to wash your hands" … I know these experiences are so important because that made me feel so unworthy and it made me feel like I couldn't fit in. What's the use? As I was going to go back home, and my fingernails would be dirty tomorrow. We didn't have running water at that point so it's things like this that really had an impact on me.

This participant's view on her educator changed once she endured that situation, one that embarrassed her and made her feel degraded. The experience negatively impacted her ability to fit in. She attributed her inability to fit in to being 'dirty' and lacking the parental support at home.

The previous passages address how participants had not fit in at mainstream educational institutions. The primary reasons that interviewees attributed their inability to fit in were related to race and class-based differences from those of their peers. Feelings of not fitting in

appeared to occur early in age as some participants addressed not fitting in at school while in elementary school. It appears as though that early feelings of not fitting in set the tone of many interviewees' educational experiences. What can be concretely stated is that students understood their feelings of not fitting in. Pidgeon (2008) suggests that students of varying ethnic backgrounds may face barriers making connections with their peers within educational institutions, especially if a large proportion of the student body is White (p. 345-346). Class inequality appeared to be an added factor to not fitting in. This idea aligns with the valuing of cultural capital, as those who are underprivileged are thought to have much less valued forms of cultural capital. The majority of participants in this study had experienced feelings of not 'fitting in' at school largely due to race and class inequality stemming from their negative experiences with educators and peers. Ultimately, educators and support staff may not have a thorough understanding of the challenges that Indigenous students disproportionately face (NCCAH, 2017, p. 3), and this may factor in to why Indigenous students are being inaccurately perceived, in conjunction to some Indigenous students lacking trust with teachers and the educational system. These negative experiences were further compounded when students felt that they were inaccurately perceived by educators and peers by way of accusations and belittling.

Inaccurate Perceptions

A predominant barrier to education was that many participants had experiences of feeling negatively inaccurately perceived. Interviewees faced accusations and experiences of feeling like they were being looked down upon by educators, and in some cases, family. These interactions were often perceived as being race fueled. These situations often led to feelings of mistrust within the educational system. After feeling blamed and inaccurately perceived, many participants completely disconnected from particular educators, to the point of not looking at one another. One can imagine the hostility, having a bad relationship with an authoritative figure.

Participants spoke of situations of hostility at school. In particular, one individual had been identified as a bully at the school, which she perceived as a racialized issue. This participant recollected a story from middle school where an exercise on bullying had put her in an uncomfortable situation at school. She stated:

> In junior high, all of the students received a paper [to anonymously state bullies within the school]. Supposedly, my name came up number one and my brother's name came up number two and I'm not sure why. If I didn't smile, people thought I was mean? Or was it the teachers that assumed I was mean… I was happy and [my brother] got along with a lot of people and he was listed and I'm not sure why… [The principal] said if she continued to hear that I'm bullying, she will suspend me. She never heard anything, obviously. Was it her way of trying to intimidate me or to pretty much scare me? I didn't get it at all. I did not get it. They would think I was mean but when I opened my mouth and started talking to people, then their idea changed about me. It was more or less white people who assumed I was a mean person just by looking at me.

This situation and interaction had resonated with this participant, as she felt that it was unfounded. She felt that others had perceived her in a negative light because of her appearance, as someone of Indigenous descent. This largely led to feelings of distrust regarding the intentions of the principal of her junior high school.

Being inaccurately perceived led to many feelings of contention within the educational sector and these interactions largely occurred within early educational years. A participant mentioned a time where she was accused of doing drugs despite the fact that she was not involved in that behaviour. The educator approached her mother after the participant had made her mother aware of the situation:

> My mom said, "stop accusing my daughter of doing drugs" and that was the end of that and ever since then, the principal left me alone. Was it because she found out that I had a voice? That I could speak for myself? That I would actually tell somebody? I think she was trying to bully me… intimidate me in some sort of way. But actually, I have a voice to tell this and I wasn't scared of her. She actually left me alone to think of it. She never bugged me after that. She actually never smiled at me anymore but who cares.

The participant spoke about how this accusation led to avoidance on behalf of the educator. She made a profound statement regarding her voice and how she could exercise it when necessary. By speaking out and letting her mother know promptly, she felt that she was able to exercise

autonomy over her body and representation when she faced false accusations. This situation negatively affected her overall experience within mainstream education.

Other racially based interactions of being inaccurately perceived occurred in the home setting. These types of interactions were understood as 'underlying', described as some sort of silent rule. This participant spoke about negative experiences at home with extended relatives:

> [My white family members] who lived near us felt like we are 'under'. Like success for us would be to look after people – be chambermaids or waitresses, something that didn't pay very well because we would never succeed, and I felt like we had this underlying silent rule… A message, I guess, was given to us by other family members on my dad's side, and even though they would say they wanted us to succeed and go to school and finish grade 12 or whatever – I always thought that there was this underlying message that they would give us, that we would not succeed and that we would have to serve others. Serving others is fine when it's in the way that we want to serve and not in the way they would want us to serve, you know what I mean?

This participant felt that her non-Indigenous family members viewed her and her siblings as "less than" – feeling consistently judged and this had equated to negative feelings. She spoke of another time a lot farther down the road when she was defending her master's thesis by providing a professional answer to a scenario presented to her:

> I presented everything that I could think of and I passed with flying colours as I touched on all the points and at the very end when we were leaving and saying goodbye, the one teacher followed me out and she goes "that was really good, however, we gave you something so easy" and it really made me feel angry at that time. I thought, I just worked for seven years to get where I'm going, and you say you gave me something easy. I think they gave that to everybody, but I don't know what she had with me and later on she asked to join me on Facebook, and I thought no. Now, I am strong enough as even when I attended that school, I would have added her thinking that's what you do with authority.

She felt that her hard work was belittled. She did not understand why this educator would confront her and make a comment after many years of hard work. This particular participant dealt with a lot of degradation throughout her life, particularly throughout her educational pursuits. Ultimately, these negative interactions resonated with this individual.

Fulfilling Familial Financial and Care Obligations[10]

This section addresses the varied roles that participants had taken on while attending school that often led to leaving school early. Indigenous students often struggle with obligations related to family and personal issues which is an added barrier to their educational completion (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 50). Adult Indigenous learners are disproportionately more likely to have additional family responsibilities and more than not, this is what is cited as their primary reason for leaving school prematurely (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 50). Many individuals in this research began working at an early age and this negatively affected attendance rates, as well as the amount of time that they had to put forth to their studies. They worked because their family did not have the means to stay afloat and often could not make ends meet. Sometimes, participants contributed to the wellbeing of their family in the form of purchasing groceries, paying bills, and performing unpaid (and paid) care work at home.

The NCCAH (2017) states that "poverty restricts access to education through the financial costs of schooling, such as school fees, transportation, and books, and through limiting an individual's access to further education because of responsibilities to support a household" (p. 4). This was the case in this study. It is important to note that I address this theme as a barrier, however, this theme may be indicative of a cultural outlook, as family connectedness within Indigenous cultures has been characterized as culturally significant (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 347). Indigenous families highly value family, including extended relations (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 347). Further research could be done in this area.

As mentioned, many participants began working at an early age. Approximately 73 percent of the sample began working while attending secondary school, some earlier than others. Entering the employment sector at an early age was often due to interviewees living in

[10] From this point on, names (both genuine and designated pseudonyms) will be used.

low income households. Participants took on responsibilities to alleviate financial pressures at home. Lee addressed her employment background:

> I started working when I was 13 as a dishwasher. [Later], I was a supervisor at a restaurant and then at a grocery store, so I basically always worked. I might work six hours at one place or eight hours at another place. I just wanted to save money and my parents were in a bad spot, so I was paying for their hydro as my mom was sick and I would have to help my parents as I wanted my sisters to have stuff and my parents couldn't really buy them clothes and it was the only way they could do it.

All participants either stated or inadvertently stated that they came from lower income households. Early in their youth, they began to work. Juliette worked a young age while she simultaneously attended school, as a means of supporting her family in tight financial situations. Juliette recounted:

> I started pretty much working full-time and the reason why I started working so many hours is because I remember this one night, my mom and dad were downstairs talking, and I could hear my mom crying. She doesn't know that I heard this conversation, but she was crying because she was short on something and that she didn't want to cut short on groceries… you know with six kids, it's important to feed us. I remember my payday was just being a couple days after that and I went and bought some groceries and me and my mom sat down and talked, and we agreed that I would start buying a little bit of groceries with my paycheques. I let her talk to me like she was just trying to teach me a life lesson to be prepared to look after myself, but I could just see how much it hurt her because I mean, having to have your daughter help you with groceries, it would be kind of a hard thing to admit to. We made it through and it's hard to talk about [it].

Juliette had difficulty speaking about this sensitive period in her life. She came from a large family with few economic resources. She helped provide necessities for her family to get by monthly. Juliette worked in the evenings and during lunch hours to help with peak business hours, however, working these hours negatively affected her attendance as she stated that she would often leave school earlier and come back to school late.

Newfound family dynamics led others to work at a young age. Glenda decided it was time to seek paid employment when her parents separated which led to her initial early school leaver status. Glenda stated:

> I guess, I just thought at the time that when my parents separated that I needed to start working so I just left school to work instead of going to school even though I could have done both at the same time, but I chose to work instead of going to school…

Glenda addressed how she came from a large and low-income family. After her parent's separation, Glenda pursued paid employment which led to her leaving school early. Reflecting back, Glenda feels that she could have worked and went to school simultaneously. Other participants in the sample began working as young as 12 as they came from low-income homes.

Additionally, some participants did not perceive their family homes to be appropriate because of dysfunction within the home and this led to working at an early age. Erika posited:

> When we moved to Edson, we were neglected children, so we didn't have rules or boundaries and all I could think of at age 12 was how to leave home as soon as I could so I started work a couple months before age 12. I worked in a restaurant as a dishwasher. Prior to that, I went to stay at a lady's place who hired me as a live-in babysitter. I went to school while I was with her.

Erika began working at a very early age because of her home circumstances, often characterizing herself as a neglected child. She wanted to leave home as soon as possible and was prioritizing this aspect of her life.

Interviewees also participated in domestic paid and unpaid care work which influenced leaving school early. Participants cared for their sibling's children, elderly family members, and their own children. They took part in these duties to help their family members, and sometimes in addition to helping family members, they also received financial compensation as a means of supporting themselves. Danielle spoke about her unique situation of leaving school prematurely. She made the decision to care for her sister's children when her sister needed help to further her educational journey. Danielle came from a low-income large family, sharing a similar family background to others in the sample. She posited:

> My sister had gone through a divorce and her kids moved here and they were young. I think my nephew was in grade one and my niece was in kindergarten. I took the role of caring for them while their mom (my sister), figured out her problems and she went back to school to attend post-secondary. I looked after her kids when she went back to school and I got paid for babysitting. I had an income because I was watching them. [After a period of time], I pretty much decided on my own that it was time for me to go back to school.

Danielle left school to ensure that her sister was able to pursue higher education during a difficult time in her life. By caring for her niece and nephews, Danielle was able to gain an

income while simultaneously supporting her sister's educational and personal endeavours. Danielle made a sacrifice to help her sister, at the expense of her education. Jade had also taken on care duties to support her grandmother. She stated: "[My grandmother] had a terminal illness and I went back [home] to help her to take care of her and when she got better, we moved here and just kind of settled and I went back to school again". Jade had relocated to care for her grandmother who was ill, and it was when her grandmother got healthy that she was able to return to school. Her grandmother's illness superseded any educational goals that Jade had at that time.

In some situations, participants' families heavily relied on them for support despite their young age. Erika's family was low-income and faced some problems which led them to leaning on Erika for a place to live despite Erika being a teenager. She addressed her employment and how she supported her family:

> I worked at the restaurant half days and went to the school half days. I went to school from 9-12pm and went to work from noon to midnight. I met a girl that worked at the restaurant who was a few years older and I would have been about 14 or 15 and she was looking for an apartment and for a roommate and so we found an apartment and I shared the space and my family moved in and it was a fiasco. I lived in a motel while we were waiting for the apartment and I supported myself and my sister through working. I would have been in grade 9 then so that's when I quit (high school).

Erika addressed her family life as tumultuous. She had expressed the care that was provided to her as neglectful. She also expressed that she had spent a period of time in the foster system. Her family situation ultimately led her to leaving school very prematurely.

This theme of fulfilling familial financial and care obligations often led to participants leaving school early to prioritize their personal and family wellbeing. These obligations appear to be an issue of lacking in economic capital. However, this theme may be indicative of a larger cultural element of supporting the collective in Indigenous family units. The OECD (2017) suggests that communal Indigenous values are largely focused on family including "clan, nation and tribe, as well as history, nature, country and environment" (p. 28). For the purposes of this research, it can only be assumed that there is a cultural element embedded in the larger framing

of what is going on in these situations. This research suggests that Indigenous students may support family members because of financial and economic issues. This is a question for future research. By fulfilling family needs, participants are not being adequately supported in their education endeavors, as they are instead supporting their family members. Bruce et al. (2012) has posited that when student feel supported by their family, this will translate into better experiences within the educational sector and consequentially positively effect completion rates (p. 49). Ultimately, students are experiencing barriers to their education as they often are focused on the wellbeing of their family unit.

Summary

Barriers to education were largely associated with (1) issues of fitting in; (2) facing negative inaccurate perceptions; and (3) fulfilling family financial and care obligations. Educational institutions do not consider these identified barriers which in turn makes it difficult for Indigenous students to conventionally succeed in the educational sector. As mentioned, Indigenous students largely do not have their social and cultural assumptions represented within mainstream education, which further exacerbates barriers. Consequentially, inequality is perpetuated as students who are better positioned (white middle class) do not experience these race-based and class-based barriers to education.

Chapter 6: ABE Programs Challenging Social Reproduction

The second question that this research addresses is: How do ABE programs work to challenge social reproduction in education? ABE programs appear to challenge social reproduction to varying degrees. This is evident upon taking a closer look at participants experiences within the ABE educational sector, including a look at how ABE programming appears to positively influence Indigenous secondary completion rates as well as acts as a stepping stone to higher education.[11] This section takes a broad look at how ABE programs are challenging social reproduction including an emphasis on what can be done further in supporting Indigenous capital and success within the educational sector. ABE institutions may challenge social reproduction in the educational sector by: (1) supporting educational completion and acting as a stepping stone to higher education; (2) facilitating feelings of fitting in; (3) provisioning of essential supports; and (4) promoting aspects of culturally responsive education.

ABE Programming Positively Influencing Educational Completion

The participants in this study disproportionately completed their education through ABE programming. Nine of ten early school leavers received secondary completion credentials. Similarly, seven of ten early school leavers went on to post-secondary education. Over those seven, six completed post-secondary (1 diploma; 5 degrees) including one master's degree graduate. This sample suggests that ABE programming positively influences educational completion as well as acts as a stepping stone to higher education. This is where ABE programs may challenge social reproduction as social reproduction asserts that the educational sector

[11] Table 3.1 on page 30 provides an overview of educational completion.

perpetuates a cycle of inequality but within this sample, this suggests that some of the needs of Indigenous learners are being met.

Fitting In

Despite many feelings of not fitting in, which were discussed earlier, many participants did experience situations of fitting in within ABE institutions and other FN educational centres. The following participants highlighted how in-school native clubs, attending school with students who share similar experiences, and having supportive educators attributed to 'fitting in at school'. Milne (2016) has stated that Indigenous students may feel an increased sense of belonging "when they see Indigenous peoples, cultures, and histories reflected in class materials and that information is presented in a respectful way" (p. 74). Ultimately, if ABE programs can focus on creating and maintaining Indigenous students' sense of belonging within educational institutions, this may positively influence educational retention among this population.

Participants spoke of situations where they did fit in and feelings of fitting in often occurred in ABE educational institutions. Glenda explicitly felt like she did not fit in while she attended mainstream educational centers, but did fit in, when she attended ABE programming. She attributed her newfound sense of belonging to the increased Indigenous population at the school. Glenda stated:

> When I went back [to an ABE school], I felt more comfortable. I wanted to go every day. I enjoyed going every day compared to when I was 15 or 16… I felt more comfortable around my peers compared to when I was in high school. The only reason I felt more comfortable is that everyone was 90% Native, I guess. That's what made it more fun. I wanted to go every day. It just felt right.

She felt like she belonged as she was attending school with a population she could identify with compared to her past, which was heavily embedded with encounters of racism. Fitting in encouraged her to attend school regularly as she found it 'comfortable' and 'fun' which ultimately led her to complete both secondary and post-secondary education. Ultimately, ABE programming had met her needs. This example suggests that if ABE programming can

encourage and prioritize Indigenous students' senses of belonging, this may positively influence educational completion rates as well as the overall experiences of Indigenous students in the educational sector. In addition, if ABE programs can increase feelings of fitting in, this may be helpful to combatting feelings of distrust between students and mainstream education.

Encouraging educators influence students' feelings of fitting in. If students feel encouraged and appreciated by their educators, they will be positively impacted. Karnella expressed her feelings of fitting in while attending an ABE program. She stated:

> When I attended an ABE program, my instructor was awesome. I just loved her. She was a good role model to me and I'm still in contact with her today. She's been through a lot in her life and I admire her for who she is. She was my teacher in adult 10 and adult 12. I always looked up to her and I knew there was something about her. It was like a bright light that I was attracted to. You know what I mean? … She has made me not be afraid to answer questions and to open up a lot more. I never used to be able to talk. I would never volunteer myself for an interview knowing that I had to talk, until I met her. She made it easier for me. She pushed me to be able to speak to people more, to open up and tell people how I feel and stuff like that.

She felt that the support and encouragement of her teacher had allowed her to blossom as a person, to become someone who can speak up and engage with others. That instructor made a life-long impact on her. Neegan (2005) has emphasized the importance of educators in the lives of students, as they can either promote a positive learning environment or "deflate the ambitions of students and lead to poor academic performance or the students dropping out" (p. 10). Pidgeon (2008) suggests that educational institutions dedicated to supporting Indigenous students' capital, can promote social capital (connections with peers and faculty), as well as enhancing cultural capital that is necessary for higher education (p. 351). ABE programs that support Indigenous social capital will therefore positively affect Indigenous completion rates within the educational sector.

The prevalence of Native student centres encouraged feelings of fitting in. The Indigenous students centre provided a space for students to come together and congregate. Jade stated:

> I went to a school and at least there, they had a Native student club and they had quite a few Aboriginal students. I guess that's the only time I fit in. But if all my friends were sick or not at school, I felt lost, so lost. I don't think I ever fit in other than in that small Aboriginal population [at that school].

Jade felt similarly to Glenda, in terms of how Indigenous representation at school influenced feelings of fitting in. Jade has gone to school for many years, as she has a post-secondary degree and is considering graduate school in the future. Despite her long educational history, she had not fit in through most of it. The Native student club was impactful to Jade's sense of belonging within the educational sector. This speaks to the efficacy of creating Indigenous focused spaces for FNMI students.

Participants felt as though they fit in better when they were adequately supported from their educators, when they could identify with their peers, and when there were Indigenous focused spaces such as Native clubs/centres. ABE programs appear to be combatting Indigenous feelings of not fitting in, as they more often than not, are promoting Indigenous senses of belonging. This is an example of where ABE programs may challenge social reproduction. If ABE programs are embracing the cultural capital of Indigenous students, this positively influences educational rates as well as overall positive connections with mainstream educational institutions.

Provisioning of Supports

ABE institutions that provide additional support to their students can facilitate higher rates of educational completion among the student body. The provisioning of these supports can alleviate economic situations that often lead students to leaving school prematurely. An ABE program provided Jessie with support during a time when of hardship and this consequentially led to her completing her secondary ABE education. Jessie stated:

> With [my school], it wasn't just my studies that they helped with, they helped with all different aspects like financial and childcare. If I needed help with anything, I would just have to go see certain people. I remember in grade 10, I was living in an apartment building and there was a coin-op laundry room in the building and two loads of my kids' laundry went missing and I was freaking out at school and I didn't know what to do

> because I kept having to wash my kids clothes every day. And I was thinking it was only a matter of time before their schools noticed and then they're gonna start digging around and assuming that I'm too poor to buy them clothes or whatever. I was stressed out about it. There was a woman from the school, she had a bunch of lunch stuff set aside then she gave it to me for the kids' lunch… She had taken us to a few stores, and she bought stuff for the kids. She bought the girls some clothes and then she took us to superstore or Walmart, and she bought them underwear and socks and stuff like that. There was so much help from that school like if you need help with anything, they will help you. That was a huge help. Without that support I guarantee I wouldn't have successfully finished my grade, let alone graduated. The other schools didn't have that support. At least not what they made aware to us.

The ABE program was able to provide Jessie with direct support of necessities (food and clothing), during an unfortunate circumstance in her personal life. These resources allowed her to continue her education regardless of her economic state. Aside from this situation, Jessie made several attempts at completing her education at various ABE institutions, as she has a chronically ill child. Because of her child's health, she often needs additional accommodation, in the form of extended absences, to complete her education. However, not all ABE programs provided these accommodations; this suggests that ABE programs vary in support provisioning.

ABE institutions that cater to Indigenous student's needs, in this case family needs, will promote adult educational completion. In the same sense, if ABE institutions do not provide the necessary supports that Indigenous students often need, inequality will continue to be perpetuated. This leaves the Indigenous learner group systematically disadvantaged, despite aims to support this population.

Culturally Responsive Education

Participants did not add insight on whether their ABE programs provided education in a manner that is culturally relevant (met their cultural needs in anyway). Participants mainly focused on whether there were aspects of school that they enjoyed or did not enjoy, whether they fit in or not, and whether they felt comfortable or uncomfortable in the classroom. Participants largely spent time addressing problems they experienced at school.

Established relationships among students and educators appear to have a positive effect on FNM educational gratification. Danielle enjoyed school when she attended an on-reserve school despite her Métis heritage. She stated:

> I didn't like school until I went to [the on-reserve] school. That's when I really got into it and when I learned a lot. [I enjoyed] the positive atmosphere around you and everything was more positive and happier. I found a big-time difference with the teachers too probably because I travelled with a teacher [to school from the city]. There were a couple teachers where we became really close. One teacher would always talk to us and ask us how we're doing and made sure that we are okay in our home life. She would make sure we were fed.

Danielle had a history of trouble within mainstream educational institutions as she consistently felt judged and perceived as a "bad" individual. Danielle stated:

> To me, it was just the cycle of being mistreated from teachers. The cycle of growing up and one teacher saying, "this person is a bad person and to tell others that they should watch them as they are really bad." New teachers would come in who don't know you and a teacher would tell them that this kid is a bad person and tell them "good luck with that kid." You know what I mean? That carried on right until high school in town. There was a lot of that.

By transferring schools to an on-reserve school, she was able to have a fresh start at a place where she felt acceptance and joy within school. She appreciated that her educators were interested in their overall wellbeing and that they were willing to engage in positive relationships with students that went beyond typical educational relationships. What resonated with Danielle, is that educators checked in on students and asked if they were fed, placing emphasis on their home life. Pidgeon (2008) suggests that education should be reinvented to include a focus on the human being nature of individuals as well as their development of professional skills; education has to "involve every aspect of student life, having the support and involvement of the students, their family and peers along with the institution, its staff, and faculty" (p. 350). Danielle's educational program included aspects of this wholistic approach that Pidgeon discusses, and it also resonated as an important educational memory for Danielle.

Participants largely addressed bad experiences associated with school. They were asked what they liked and did not like in school throughout their years. Lee enjoyed school when she

went on to an Indigenous focused university degree program. It was a chance for her to strengthen her Indigenous identity in a positive educational setting. Lee posited:

> I liked school once I moved to [specified city]. I got really involved in the Native Students Association. I didn't have a lot of First Nations stuff growing up, like my mom brought us to pow wows, but my dad's family was white. I learned a lot when I went to school… When I went to university, I took the Native stream… Indigenous human services.

Lee developed enjoyment within the educational sector when she enrolled in a Native stream educational program and where there was a Native Students Association as it gave her an opportunity to engage with Indigenous material. This suggests that Indigenous groups, such as Native student Associations, and education, catered to Indigenous content, positively influences Indigenous educational completion.

Culturally appropriate programming is essential to Indigenous prosperity within educational institutions. A common educational barrier for Indigenous students is the lack of cultural elements in mainstream education, in areas of "culturally sensitive curricula, teaching methods, and assessments" (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 52). In addition, Indigenous students cannot attain valued forms of Indigenous cultural capital if the educational institutions have a cultural shortfall – that is, highly valued forms of Indigenous beliefs/practices are not reflected within the institutions (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 52). In addition to providing avenues for FNMI valued forms of cultural attainment, the OECD (2017) states that:

> successful schools provide environments where Indigenous students feel connected and valued. This can be achieved through the representation of Indigenous cultures in the classroom and celebrating them throughout the school programme. Practical steps can be taken, including making available Indigenous books and other resources and by embedding Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum and the life of schools" (p. 55).

Ensuring that Indigenous cultures are represented in the classroom has been posited as important. This sentiment was the catalyst to a participant's criticism of her ABE program. Glenda stated:

> They used to have a native studies class for credit, but they took that away and their students are 90% native. One of the teachers wanted to get that back but I think she was denied. It doesn't make sense, does it? The students were wanting native studies and they took that away and they changed it to history, regular history! In that class you

> learned a tiny bit, a tiny bit [of Native Studies]. Why wouldn't we learn about Native studies and have a tiny bit of regular history, right? So now, I don't get that at all.

This reinforces the importance of providing education in a manner that responds to the needs of Indigenous learners. Neegan (2005) provides meaningful insight – "there is not enough of Native culture in the curriculum. If the students cannot identify with what is being taught, there is really nothing for them to do but to disengage" (p. 11). Glenda recognized that her classroom content was not representative of her and her classmate's Indigenous identity and history. She found it to be problematic. Educational institutions that cater to Indigenous learners but provide ethnocentric curriculums and mainstream pedagogies are operating under the notion of institutional racism (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 354). These curriculums and pedagogies "serve to reinforce the knowledge and experiences of white, middle class learners" (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 96), which aligns completely with the assertions of social reproduction. Indigenous learners have a hard time finding applicability of course content that fails to appropriately address their "histories, values, perspectives and worldviews" (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 96).

ABE programs challenge social reproduction in education as such programming meets many of the needs of Indigenous adult learners. Often times, participants felt supported by their ABE programs. For some, they felt that their ABE programs created an environment to thrive while fitting in and in turn, facilitated a newfound appreciation in education, and, for many, a stepping stone to higher education despite facing many challenges throughout their educational journeys. Participants addressed how ABE programming had supported them in their educational journeys directly in terms of providing resources in time of need, understanding circumstances that require a temporary leave of absence, and indirectly by identifying with the student body. Although much praise was attributed to ABE programming, there was also some criticism in terms of the educational institution not being sensitive to barriers (e.g., missing school because of illness and children's illness), and the lack of Indigenous history.

To adequately meet the needs of ABE learners, programming has to be responsive to Indigenous students. Programming needs to continue to be improved to meet the needs of Indigenous learners. Indigenous learners recognize and appreciate the supports that are provided to them. This is largely reflected in the participant data as addressed earlier in chapter 6. Ultimately, if ABE programming is devoted to furthering their commitment to meeting the needs of Indigenous students – the programming has to be reflective of Indigenous cultural capital and the provisioning of other supports, particularly as they relate to financial supports.

Summary

There is some evidence to suggest that ABE programs are, to different extents, challenging notions of social reproduction. ABE programs with the goal of meeting Indigenous learners' needs should establish relationships with communities, as well as community leaders and elders, such as Elder Armand, to discuss Indigenous cultural capital and how that can be reflected in educational institutions appropriately. Ultimately, the experiences of Indigenous students, including fitting in, feeling supported in school, and their overall educational completion rates despite their early leaver status is evidence of ABE programs challenging social reproduction. There is a lot more work that needs to be done in order to adequately meet the needs of Indigenous adult learner, particularly in relation to providing Indigenous students culturally responsive education. This research aligns with other consistent calls "for more culturally-responsive pedagogies and curriculum as a means of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students" (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011, p. 106).

Chapter 7: Early School Leavers and Success

The third question is addressed within this research: In light of broader structural constraints, how do early leavers who have returned to an adult educational program define educational success? Participants addressed what success meant to them through a variety of probes, some of which include: Who is someone you deem successful and why? Can you tell me about a time when you felt success? Data was coded and placed into the following themes: (1) success rooted in the youth; (2) success rooted in community resilience; and (3) success encompassing Indigenous values, beliefs and worldviews. Each of these three themes will be addressed individually below.

Success Rooted in the Youth

Success for participants was largely enmeshed with community youth in some form or another. Emphasis was placed on youth engagement through cultural means including language, identity, and the development and maintenance of traditional skillsets as well in areas of youth programming including recreation and employment engagement. I address this theme as at the root of success, overall youth wellbeing was at the heart of it. A large part of reaching success meant that participants were able to situate themselves in positions to engage with the youth and pass on important elements of Indigenous identity.

A heavy importance was placed on language and ensuring that the youth developed a connection to it. This was one of the areas that Elder Armand spoke extensively about. He expressed the importance of engaging youth with their Indigenous language (Cree), as a means of developing their identity as Indigenous peoples. He is strongly engaged with the youth as he speaks to the children in his community, within a classroom setting, on a regular basis; he is actively engaging in intergenerational knowledge transfer. His teachings are integrated in the formal education system within the FN school in his community. He states:

> I talk about how they're kind of losing their identity. We need a curriculum for teachers and we're trying to get people that talk Cree fluently, in the classrooms and be part of the school. I told them that the best place to start is nursery and kindergarten. When they start speaking Cree, it stays in their head. When they grow up, they'll never forget. We [elders] go and talk to the kids, mostly on their language. Their language is most important. They have to learn so they know their identity, as of right now, they don't know their identity. I think it's important to know. That's why we are stressing that on the kids, because once they know their language and understand the ceremonies… they will know who they are. We kind of lost that in the late 70's, from the 80's down. From the 80's up, they grew up talking English and that's how a lot of them lost their language; they're the ones now that have little kids going to school and we're hoping those kids will learn how to talk Cree so they can teach their parents how to talk Cree.

Elder Armand regularly engages with the youth regarding the purpose of language and ceremony in terms of developing strong identity formations. He also provides land-based classes to the children from his FN community school; he teaches them how to trap animals by taking them to his traplines and showing them what to do. He shares his knowledge, skills, and beliefs (cultural capital) to be passed down to generations as a form of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) address the relationship between Indigenous values and identity:

> Indigenous knowledge systems, which encompass the local and specific knowledge of their people, emerging out of their languages, values, beliefs, and practices affirm Indigenous identity and are the basis of Indigenous peoples' cultural integrity. Indigenous knowledge includes processes that are intergenerational, land based, tied to narrative and experiential, ensuring continuity of knowledge across the generations (p. 94).

If ABE institutions wish to provide culturally responsive and relevant education to Indigenous students, they need to consider the central importance of what encompasses Indigenous identity, such as language and ceremony, including proper protocol of knowledge transfer.

Elder Armand made a point of emphasis that providing youth a thorough understanding of the Cree language can be a method of addressing a gap in the loss of language in his home community. This line of thought aligned with Jessie's perspective when she spoke of her son and his plans to enroll in a Cree immersion school. I asked her the importance of it, and she said:

> Because we've lost our language and our culture for so long and it's hard for me to teach them because I don't really know much. A lot of the people that we know that could be

> teaching us, they have busy lives too, so it's kind of hard to get those teachings. I'm hoping he [son] can teach us.

Jessie has been disconnected culturally and she believes that her son's engagement with the language will allow him to teach her and the rest of the family. Jessie placed value on Indigenous language and culture in her discussions of success. It is important to reiterate that Indigenous populations have varying levels of cultural connection.

FNM participants viewed success through further engagement with the youth in areas of employment and recreation. For Erika, her dream goal of becoming successful equated to working directly with First Nation youth on reserve. She believes that she can offer guidance and overall hope to First Nation children. She did not have that when she was younger as she had spent time in the foster system and lived in poverty throughout her formative years, associating her upbringing with being neglected as a child. Erika stated:

> I'm happy because for me, success is doing what I've done and getting where I want to be in my life and finally reaching that ultimate goal of working with the kids because I think that's where we need to work to help First Nations people. We have to teach them when they're little so they grow up to be successful, so they can be active members of society and still have their beliefs and do what they need to do culturally, to build a life without using suicide and addictions as a coping mechanism, so I have big shoes to fill over here. I'm really hoping I'll make a difference in someone's life. I reached success with one goal and that was to work on-reserve with First Nations children. I started working there [recently], so that's quite exciting for me to be doing that.

Erika's childhood influenced how she perceives success in her life; specifically, she sees it as youth based as one part of her broad personal conceptualization. Erika appears to be primarily focused on providing support as a means of addressing larger issues of suicide and addiction. Erika continued to address what she would share with the general First Nations Community:

> I really think it's the educational piece [success] and not only that, but actually having a job and taking my education and working with it, in what I do for a living. I don't care what kind of degree or if it's on the-the-job training, I think that they [First Nations population] need something that will offer them hope. If I were to speak to them, I would tell them how neglected we were and stuff like that… I would say that it's been many hard years of hard work, but this is what you can do, you can do this. With the proper support, you can do this! That's what I would say to them [First Nations Community].

Erika had put forth an understanding of success embedded in education, employment, and engaging with the youth by setting an example of who they can be even if they had a more difficult early life such as herself.

Coming home to work with youth had been expressed by other participants as a means of reaching success in their lives. Providing community-based programming for on-reserve youth was a priority for Karnella. She stressed the lack of appropriate programming that her First Nation community was able to provide. Karnella stated:

> To tell you the truth, this is probably what gave me this positive view on life… I knew I needed to make things more positive for my youth because when I came home [from the city], I knew there was nothing here and I felt it [in terms of programming]. I thought O.K., I need to bring things back. I'm not to say that no one was trying as people here are probably trying. I know there were things happening when I wasn't here. I [also] know that youth didn't feel that close connection to a lot of people in our community and I started to know that, when I was talking to the youth.

Karnella had come home to her FN community after upgrading her education in the city. She spent time speaking with the youth and came to terms with her calling, which was based on supporting the youth through direct community programming. After completing her secondary education, and leaving post-secondary education early, she went to her home community to utilize her credentials in a way that she found meaningful to herself and her community. This was success for Karnella.

Ultimately, an emphasis was made on community youth with regard to reaching notions of success. Success was rooted in youth learning their Indigenous language as an integral aspect of identity formation and cultural preservation, working with the youth to provide a sense of hope as a positive aspect of role modeling, and coming home to provide youth with programming in FN communities.

Success Rooted in Community Resilience

Success for participants was also rooted in community resilience. They often spoke of resiliency in regard to their self, their immediate and extended relations, and the broader

Indigenous community. FNM participants addressed situations of single parenting, alcoholism, abuse, and low socioeconomic status. During interviews, participants often attributed meeting success through these stories of resilience; detailed stories of overcoming challenges and barriers were central. Overcoming adversities and meeting educational goals were often paired in conceptualizations of reaching success. Other times, overcoming challenges and living a healthy and happy life was what success encompassed for participants. Ultimately, resilience regardless if it encompassed education or not was what participants addressed as success.

Erika focused on success in more of a traditional sense in terms of achieving higher levels of education while overcoming larger barriers. However, she was quick to stress that reaching success was not about income. It was more encompassing than that. Erika posited:

> I have a sister who went to school and got her master's… I remember thinking, I wish I could do what she's doing… She took her babies to class. That's a success story, and it's not because she is making big money, it's because she has managed to raise her children, and get an education, a master's degree as a single mom, so that's success.

Erika addressed her sister as someone who is successful – a person who was a single parent who went on get a master's degree despite having a difficult start to life. Danielle addressed success similarly; her sister was a single mom who completed post-secondary education and became a leader in the Métis community. Danielle described her sister as a successful person:

> My sister, for instance, from being a single mom with three kids to becoming the Métis Area Director. Like I said, I quit school to help her go to post-secondary. I watched her be a single mom, a divorced person to becoming who she is, a Métis leader. She is a good role model in the community. She's living a healthy lifestyle. She's had her ups and downs and she's moving into her own place. She's a successful person and she's worked hard to get to where she is. To me, I give more 'props' to the single parents, as we see it a lot, how they face their struggles and we watch them grow and blossom.

Danielle characterized her sister as someone who is most successful in her life. She focused on the fact her sister had gone through a lot and persevered despite her single parent status and then became a prominent leader in her community.

Lee addressed her friend as someone who reached success in her life. She was also a single parent. However, her friend was also a survivor of domestic abuse. Despite these barriers

in her life, she also accomplished a master's degree and went on to work in the Indigenous community. Lee posited:

> My friend went back to school to get her degree. She had four kids and at the same time, she went through an abusive relationship… She couldn't work anymore because you can't [work] when you're not healthy. She was burning out and she ended up leaving her husband. She got her master's [degree]. She created an Indigenous women's task force and all sorts of stuff and that's success as she was just another teen mom.

Lee viewed success as reaching educational goals while overcoming domestic abuse, as well as raising children and getting involved in the larger Indigenous community by creating an Indigenous women's task force.

Situational barriers, such as family responsibilities, have been posited as a major barrier to adult female learners (Flynn, Brown, Johnson & Rodger, 2011, p. 44). Participants in this sample valued women in their lives getting ahead despite family responsibilities. For Danielle, family responsibilities affected her in her youth, paired with economic insecurity; she had made the sacrifice so her sister could surpass barriers associated with being a single parent. On top of single parenting for Lee's friend, she also had to deal with family violence as an additional barrier. Flynn et al. (2011) states that for women, "the constraints of family responsibilities may be compounded by the effects of violence" (p. 44), and this was reflected in the participants narratives.

FNM participants often associated success in direct relation to family members overcoming adversity while maintaining a cultural core element within their lives. As referenced earlier, core elements of Indigenous culture are positive relationships with self, family, community, nation, and all of creation are held to the highest regard for many Indigenous peoples (CCL, 2009, p. 5). Karnella appreciated her sister's traditional thinking while she was addressing the most successful person in her life. She stated:

> My sister has been through a lot in her life. She was a mother figure sometimes… she took over that role of being a parent at a young age. She taught me how to be strong. Growing up, I saw what my sister had to go through. [In consideration] of everything she had to go through, and the person that she became today, she is the person I would want to be. I want to be her and more. She's more in tune with her traditional way of

> thinking… She's not rich or anything like that, [considering] the things she has gone through, she's the most successful person that I know today.

Karnella focused on her sisters' values of strength, her traditional way of thinking, and her childhood role of parenting at an early age, alluding to the hard moments that she had gone through but still came out positively.

Some participants were more critical of what success meant to them. However, these critical understandings of success were also rooted in resilience, at the individual level as well as in terms of the broader Indigenous community. Success for these participants often addresses larger societal issues, particularly in regard to high suicide rates within the Indigenous community. Troy devoted a lot of time speaking to what success meant to him and survival was integral to his conceptualization. He stated:

> Outside, everything is about survival. Yes! I got to the store and bought this… I didn't have that when I woke up that morning. That is success. All across First Nations country, no matter what reserve in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario… just day-to-day existence and identifying yourself as successful. Like I'm alive? Yes! That's successful. With the high rate of suicide, right? That's success to me.

Success for Troy was based on survival and it addresses current day societal issues that disproportionately affect Indigenous populations. For instance, suicide among First Nations youth is approximately 5 to 7 times higher than among non-Indigenous youth; for Inuit youth, the rate was "highest in the world at 11 times the national average" in 2018 (Government of Canada, 2018, para. 3). Ultimately, there was an awareness of larger societal issues of suicide among Indigenous peoples that intertwined in conceptualizations of success.

Troy went on to elaborate on his conceptualization of success. In his understandings of success, Troy focused on the disparities that he perceived between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Again, he speaks to larger issues within Indigenous communities, namely issues related to class inequality and Indigenous outlooks, which he refers to as the 'Indian way'. He emphasizes:

> The Môniyâwak way of success is growing up, going to high school, getting married… By their terms, that his success to them, having money, always wealth. Over here, in the

> Indian way, success is I survived this winter. I got my first moose. I fed my family. That was success! It's a whole different bag of bologna. You know what I mean? Success to me, growing up, I helped my grandma skin her deer. I helped my grandma take that meat off the deer, we boiled soup out of it. That was success! We got to eat! See that disparity now? We got to eat! That was success back then. Today [for some], success is your fridge is full, [and] your bills are paid. It comes down to that môniyâw way… your bills are paid, your internet is paid, the rent, the groceries, you know? There are so many different meanings of success. In my day, success meant that you had a meal in your stomach at the end of the day.

Notably, Troy suggests that success is variable among individuals. Troy perceived success in varying ways at different points in his life suggesting that success is based on circumstances. For some, gaining and maintaining the basic necessities of life is success.

Kevin proposed that success is moving beyond past traumas. He had gone through negative experiences in his life and has based his conceptualization of the term on healing and reaching happiness in his life with his family, including his partner and children. Kevin posited:

> Having [my partner] and the kids, is close [to success]. That's not my end game for success. It's being happy with myself. I have done so much bad shit in my life. It's a cycle of 'fucked-up-ness'. I understand in my heart that I know it will happen one day. I will come to the conclusion that I am me and whether I'm happy with it or not.

Kevin prioritized coming to peace with his past and looks forward to achieving complete happiness within his life as a means of reaching success. His idea of success is heavily bound in personal resilience.

Success Encompassing Indigenous Values, Beliefs and Worldviews

Finally, success for some was heavily embedded in Indigenous values, beliefs, and worldviews. It is important to note that the previous discussions on success also encompasses Indigenous values, beliefs and worldviews but the following engagements on the term explicitly speak to this topic. FNM participants addressed success through knowledge of the land, cultural elements, and community, and through song and drum. On an interesting note, more participants made the distinction that success does not encompass material items and wealth. They suggested that success was much more encompassing that that.

Elder Armand equated success to having knowledge about the land, particularly regarding Indigenous traditional territory. He attributed success to his decolonization work; he took part in a project of creating maps of the area, outlining significant points of interest. He posited:

> We had a guy in the Tribal Council that does maps [involved] and we put down the Cree names and made a big map of our trap line. All these lakes are going to have their original Cree names, not what the white people put there. That's what we put in the classrooms, and in the hallways, so the kids know [these Cree names].

Elder Armand is devoted to the maintenance of Indigenous knowledge, particularly targeting the youth as a means of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Yang and Warburton (2018) state that "elders play a central role in the transfer of traditional beliefs, language, and cultural practices, which empower Indigenous youth to connect with family and community, promoting ties to the land" (p. 88). His understanding of success connects back to his emphasis on educating the youth and the importance of the Cree language and he conveys his knowledge through the practice of intergenerational knowledge transfer. He further emphasized the importance of community within his conceptualization of success as well as the maintenance of good relations. He stated:

> My brother was a chief for about 16 years, and we have been partners together for close to 50 years now with our wild rice [business] and we never had no disputes. He cares for his community. He brought a lot of things to the reserve. He worked on the area and the school. About three of my brothers were involved [in the community]. They were leaders.

Elder Armand addressed his brother as a successful person in his life. His brother exemplified a positive relationship and connection with the community as a chief for many years. Leadership was a strong value that elder Armand admired. He appreciated the work that his brother had put into the community.

Community appeared to be integral to the participants. Troy emphasized his uncle as someone who is successful. His uncle was heavily involved in the round dance ceremonial

events.[12] He specified the values that are associated with round dance, drumming, and Indigenous peoples coming together. Troy stated:

> My uncle put our [FN community] on a map. A long time ago, he was a leader of a [specified drumming group]. They paved the way for how round dance is supposed to sound… it was about the spirit, the comradery and togetherness…

Troy emphasized his value of community by addressing his uncle as a well-known individual in the round dance community. Within his discussion regarding his uncle, he highlighted some of his personal values, regarding how ceremonies bring together the larger community.

Some participants spoke about balancing knowledge systems, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing regarding Indigenous knowledge.[13] Troy states that

> [Success is about] balancing traditional knowledge with every day Môniyâw knowledge, the one we learn on the internet. There is always that balance. That First Nations balance is the one you need to feed! Because that's what makes you live out here when you're out of stuff, out of food. What are you going to do? Go to the local food bank, no! You go out and set a snare. Right over there (points), you see rabbit runs. That's what you do, go feed your family. That's living, that's existing. Success has nothing to do with the amount of money in your pocket. Can your family live another year? That's success!

This idea of Indigenous peoples relying on traditional knowledges for survival connects to elder Armand's emphasis on teaching the children how to be on the land and trap appropriately. Success is embedded in providing resources that your family needs. This land-based knowledge is highly valued as Troy asserted that his parents had a higher educational level. He stated his parents' education:

> The Bush. But probably the same as me. I am higher, but they grew up in the bush. But that's higher than me. Right?

[12] Round dances are community gatherings of First Nations people. Music is provided by Indigenous drummers and singers, while those in attendance dance in a circle united by handholding. There are histories of how and why things are done in terms of rounddances, but for the purposes of this research, and because I do not have the rights associated with describing it any further, this brief description will suffice.

[13] Battiste (2002) states "Indigenous knowledge comprises the complex set of technologies developed and sustained by Indigenous civilizations. Often oral and symbolic, it is transmitted through the structure of Indigenous languages and passed on to the next generation through modeling, practice, and animation, rather than through the written word" (p. 2).

Troy has completed post-secondary education and his parents do not have a formal education, but he regards their education as above his. This provides insight on the value that is placed on land-based education. Land-based education, for Troy, is held in the highest regard.

On a similar note, success was noted in terms of positive relations with the land. FNM participants broadly stated that success encompasses good health, good relationships, reaching goals and happiness, as well as passing on integral values, such as respect. Erika spoke of her son as someone who she deems successful:

> My son who works for a sign company, who worked as a janitor for 10 years, I see him as successful and the reason why is because he lives off the grid which is something he's always wanted to do. He's 34 now and he has a stable girlfriend for three years and he works but yet he loves getting back to nature, so he picks berries, he picks mushrooms, he hunts, and he does all these things… a lot of which are what we taught him and to me, I find that it is success because it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter how much money you make, it matters how happy you are with life…

Success for Erika was not oriented in wealth and particular jobs. It was based on happiness, and engagement with the land. Many other participants also made the distinction that success is not equated with money. Karnella addressed success:

> To me, success is important… Like with me, I don't want to be rich. I don't want to live in a big house. I don't want to own fancy vehicles or anything like that. Success to me is just being able to teach my kids the values that I believe are important, teaching my community the values, especially the youth, that I feel are important. I want to believe that I'm a good person. I want to believe that I can make my kids good people. I want to believe that I can make my youth good people and if I can do that than that is success to me. That's the best answer that I can give.

Karnella emphasized that success was not economic based but based on happiness and values. She wants to positively impact her children, the youth and her community. This speaks to her values overall. In addition, Karnella and others emphasized the value of respect and its relationship to success. Karnella expressed "one of the biggest expectations I have of my children is to learn respect. Because without that, they might as well just do nothing because you need that to gain a lot of things in life… I want all my children to be educated but if they have a different calling, ill support them. I will not push them." Jessie felt similarly when she addressed her children: "we teach them about respect for themselves, for other people."

Success for participants strongly connected to Indigenous values, beliefs, and worldviews. It was based on good relationships with the community and with the land. It was based in the valuing of Indigenous based knowledge systems, with a focus on the youth and transmitting these knowledges accordingly. It was about sustaining oneself and relying on these traditional knowledges for sustenance. This suggests the importance of Indigenous knowledge, values and beliefs for Indigenous peoples. Notably, many participants prioritized the value of respect as a core element that parents wished to pass to their children. It was held in highest regard. Ultimately, this section addresses Indigenous cultural capital. If ABE programs wish to continually make strides forward in improving education for the Indigenous population, Indigenous cultural capital needs to be increasingly integrated into all aspects of the institution.

Summary

Success was also thought of in contemporary mainstream notions of educational completion. However, after participants emphasized the importance of completing high school education, they then proceeded to say that 'happiness' was the ultimate goal. Very few participants addressed higher education as a goal for their children and extended relations unless it was a pathway to happiness. Aside from finding happiness, participants stated that employment and a stable life was necessary. Stability included a decent paying job and caring for oneself by creating a home and owning a vehicle. Happiness, respect for oneself and for others were values held to a high regard.

Success was thought of in regard to the larger themes that flowed through their narratives and these are described as: (1) success rooted in the youth; (2) success rooted in community resilience; and (3) success encompassing Indigenous values, beliefs and worldviews. Unraveling success within Indigenous perspectives is important. These themes correlate with the research that suggests that Indigenous understandings of success may be more comprehensive than mainstream conventional notions of educational success. As mentioned

earlier educational programming needs to be reflective of these understandings (Indigenous cultural capital), if these institutions wish to better support Indigenous learners.

Chapter 8: Discussion

To briefly reiterate the main points of this work, this chapter serves as the discussion chapter. Table 8:1 is the summary of the main findings and it is a useful tool that neatly outlines the central findings in a point format.

Table: 8:1 Summary of Main Findings

Educational Barriers	**Conceptualizing Success**
Issues Fitting In	Success Rooted in the Youth
◊ Race and Class Inequality (Judgement; Enduring Name Calling; Feelings of Unworthiness; Segregation) ◊ Maltreatment by Teachers	◊ Working with the Youth (Role Modelling Success integrated with Culture and Beliefs ◊ Youth Programming on FN Reserves
Facing Inaccurate Perceptions	Success Rooted in Community Resilience
◊ Inaccurately Associated with Negative Behaviours (Bully; Drug Use) ◊ Viewed Negatively (Below Others/ Less Than) ◊ Devalued Prideful Moments	◊ Completing Higher Education (Despite Single Parenthood; Family Responsibilities; Abuse) ◊ Overcoming Hardships Generally ◊ Survival (Meeting Basic Necessities) ◊ Moving beyond Trauma
Fulfilling Familial Financial and Care Obligations	Success encompassing Indigenous Values, Beliefs and Worldviews
◊ Working in Paid Employment at an Early Age ◊ Providing Financial Care (Paying Utilities; Buying Groceries; Providing Family with Living Arrangement) ◊ Providing Care Work	◊ Maintaining Traditional Knowledges (Knowledge of the Land) ◊ Community Leadership (Based on Wellbeing of FN population) ◊ Balancing Knowledge Systems (Indigenous and non-Indigenous)
ABE Challenging Social Reproduction	
◊ ABE influencing Graduation Rates and acting as a Stepping Stone to Higher Education ◊ Fitting In ◊ Providing Services for Students and Families ◊ Culturally Responsive Education	

This research addresses 10 early school leavers narratives, including an elder's perspective on the subject matter. This study suggests that many people wrongly blame individual persons for leaving school early. The issue behind early school leaver status is structural in nature and not a matter of individual deficit or a characterization of the subset population. Indigenous students often did not fit in within mainstream educational centers, but this was largely due to experiences of racism, classism, and discrimination within the educational system that privileges a certain type of cultural capital and knowledge (white middle class). This was true for three central themes from my findings. First, students addressed varied negative experiences with both peers and educators in mainstream educational centres when they discussed not fitting in. Second, participants also addressed being negatively inaccurately perceived by peers and educators within mainstream education. Third, meeting family obligations of care work and early employment also led to initial early leaver status among participants.

Individuals who face disproportionate class and economic inequality largely found themselves providing for their families at an early age. Participants addressed factors related to low socioeconomic status including food insecurity, lack of proper housing, and other necessities (i.e. children's clothing, and running water). Ultimately, participants left school early because they had family obligations that the education system would not accommodate. Educational barriers for Indigenous early school leavers appear to be heavily entrenched in social and economic vulnerability. Focusing on early school leavers allows researchers to target vulnerable subsets of populations, by highlighting present day inequality, rather than broadly concentrating on strides forward.

ABE institutions support early school leavers in meeting their educational needs as reflected in the rate of secondary and post-secondary completion of the participant sample. These programs also supported Indigenous feelings of fitting in at school which consequentially equated to newfound senses of belonging, and enjoyment of education. ABE programs provide

supports that are necessary for educational completion. ABE institutions who wish to further meet the needs of Indigenous learners have to make strides forward in creating and promoting culturally responsive education systems as well as continuously focusing on the provisioning of supports to alleviate educational barriers. If educational institutions wish to empower Indigenous learners, the "curriculum, pedagogies, theory, and practice should emulate Indigenous ways of knowing, culture, and understanding" (Pidgeon. 2008, p. 354).

Previous experiences of early school leavers influenced their definitions of success. Cultural transmission was integral to Indigenous understandings of success. Participants prioritized youth wellbeing, focusing on providing much needed programs to them, particularly the youth from their First Nation communities. Indigenous understandings of success highlighted larger systemic inequalities including issues of suicide, addictions, and domestic abuse. Single parents were revered by participants in this regard.

Ultimately, this study shows how education systems can be better suited for Indigenous students. Indigenous worldview's, beliefs, and values, as Indigenous cultural capital, are important and should be appreciated as such, especially if mainstream society wishes to address the wrongdoings of this country. Reconciliation will not occur until all avenues of Indigenous inequality are addressed and prioritized.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this chapter, I briefly provide an overview regarding how social reproduction theory applied to my research findings. In addition, I put forth research limitations, areas for future research, and overall final thoughts. As mentioned, this thesis addresses three central research questions including: (1) What factors contributed to the educational pathways of FNM early education leavers? (2) How do ABE programs work to challenge social reproduction in education? and (3) In light of broader structural constraints, how do early leavers who have returned to an adult educational program define educational success?

Social reproduction theory was applicable in all aspects of this research, from understanding the intricacies of barriers to education, to addressing how ABE programs can work towards alleviating said barriers (i.e. incorporating varying Indigenous understandings of success) as a means of challenging social reproduction in educational institutions. The educational barriers (not fitting in; facing negative inaccurate perceptions; and, fulfilling familiar financial and care obligations) appeared to be largely fueled by race and class-based discrimination. Participants asserted that their outward appearance, distinctive of their race and class, was what caused them to not fit in at school, including being negatively perceived; this aligns with a common notion of cultural capital – that it acts as an indicator of 'who is one of us'. Fulfilling family obligations was also perceived to be an indicator of class-based inequality. Ultimately, 'correct forms' of cultural capital are associated with established class status and this translates to fewer barriers and consequentially, higher educational completion rates. ABE institutions may challenge social reproduction in the educational sector by: (1) facilitating feelings of fitting in; (2) provisioning of essential supports; (3) promoting aspects of culturally responsive education; and (4) supporting educational completion and acting as a stepping stone to higher education. If ABE institutions are promoting educational completion and positive experiences among Indigenous learners, this suggests that these educational centres are better

meeting the needs of this population. However, further work needs to be done. Participants suggested that success is: (1) rooted in the youth; (2) rooted in community resilience; and encompasses (3) Indigenous values, beliefs and worldviews. This exploration of the concept success provided a broad understanding of areas of general importance to the Indigenous community, and ultimately serves to assert that Indigenous perspectives are not reflected in conventional notions of education and success. These findings align with the idea that mainstream education is not reflective of Indigenous cultural capital and based on the interest of dominant groups in society.

Limitations

This research engaged with participants from varied backgrounds (gender, age, on/off reserve school status, and ABE programming) and included participants with higher levels of education (post-secondary education and graduate school education). In addition, this study began with the intentions of addressing self-identified First Nation individuals' educational experiences, but this did not work out entirely. Aside from Elder Armand, and one other participant, every other participant in this study completed their ABE and out of that subsample, most of those individuals went on to pursue higher education. This suggests that ABE programming is meeting the needs of certain FNM students, as students are completing their secondary education despite their previous early school leaver status. Consequentially, this research largely reflects the insights of those who reached educational milestones and educational goals, and it is not conducive of the population who did not complete their secondary education – this leaves unanswered questions about educational barriers through this specified population.

In terms of gender, women were more likely to participate than men; 82 % of participants identified as female. This equates to a study based largely on the perspectives of women. Considering a major finding of this work is based on success in regard to caring for the

collective and overall family support – this may be attributed to mainstream notions of gender roles and expectations. Reaching FN men was a harder pursuit than it was for FN women. Men were not as forthcoming as women were in this research.

Most of the participants attended school both on and off reserve. This is not surprising as ABE centres in the area are in small cities so even those who grew up on-reserve during their youth left school to attend an ABE institution as an adult. However, most participants engaged in on and off reserve schooling in their youth years. With that said, many of the participants had previous exposure to mainstream education and consequentially reported different experiences than those who did not. They were exposed to mainstream notions of valued capital throughout their formative years. Creating more participant sample similarities may be something that a future researcher may want to consider, despite the time it might take to reach specific subsets of this population, such as men. It is difficult to say if there would have been a different outcome if a male researcher was involved in this study.

Aside from sample limitations, other areas were of concern, namely, addressing sensitive subject matter. Participants were incredibly open and shared more than I expected – I would consider this aspect to be very successful. With that said, I think it is important to note that when participants are addressing personal stories on sensitive subject matter, this will always be somewhat of a limitation for researchers. For example, sensitive subject matter may negatively influence the degree to which participants openly share their stories, truths and knowledge. In my research, I ensured participants knew their rights, including the right to move on and end the interview at any time as well as the right to take a break when necessary. Participants shared very sensitive information and expressed their discomfort verbally. Despite being assured that they did not have to proceed, they continued to do so. In some cases, participants viewed their expressions of vulnerability as a much needed 'medicine' – one respondent in particular told me that 'I did much more for them, than they could do for me'. In other cases, they told me that it was very hard to speak on certain stories that were especially relevant to their educational

departures in relation to their family dynamic and past mistakes. As mentioned, I suggested breaks moving on from the topic, but participants adamantly wanted to continue. It may have had to do with getting their point across, or it could have also had to do with unequal power differentials, despite my efforts of creating a more balanced interview setting and relationship.

It is difficult to navigate the nuances of power within the research field despite all of the measures that may be put in place. I am critical of my positionality within these settings as an individual who is highly educated, and fair complexioned, and as a person who speaks in a particular way because of my educational background and it is often associated as 'different' from those in my FN community. Positionality and being reflexive within research are important as it has an effect on power within interviewing relationships.

Future Research

In terms of my initial research plan, I originally planned to address a sample from a particular ABE institution, but that fell through. However, there is value in conducting research through this lens. Not all ABE institutions are equal and will therefore, not elicit the same responses from participants, in terms of meeting their needs. Research that utilizes an Indigenous subset of population stemming from a single institution can allow a researcher to understand whether that specific institution is meeting the needs of Indigenous learners. This will allow a researcher to understand the capital transmission from institution to Indigenous students, in regard to schools that cater to this population. I would suggest doing a thorough study on mainstream educational institutions that cater to Indigenous learners to better understand if social reproduction can be challenged and how.

It would be particularly useful to do a similar study to this one, but in a longitudinal format. Auchinachie and Bowe (2017) explicitly state that these types of longitudinal studies, ones that address adult learners, are few and far between (p. 1). If a researcher addressed a population of Indigenous students enrolled in an ABE program, and followed up a period later,

this would be extremely useful in terms of understanding educational pathways from an ABE perspective. As mentioned previously, Indigenous people often leave and re-enter school repeatedly due to barriers in education but often meet educational goals at a later age. A study that was large enough could address educational pathways in regard to adult Indigenous learners. This would be valuable for those invested in the subject matter, especially when it comes to programming.

Final Thoughts

I refer to Elder Armand throughout this work, but aside from this status as an Elder, he is also my grandfather. Towards the end of my work, I had a discussion with him as he had come to visit so he could attend my sister's graduation - the sister who I have been caring for, for the last couple years, and a few summers each year before that. We had an interaction that will resonate with me for a long time, and I thought that it would shed some more light on his educational experience (with his permission), as a residential school survivor. I was having a conversation with him and gave him a hug afterward. He then told me that hugs for him are awkward. He went on to explain and state that he was not shown affection when he was younger. He went to residential school by the age of 5, leaving his family for 10 months of the year. He said that he had not ever seen a priest, nor a nun hug a child at the school, and if a child cried out, they were told to 'shut up', and to 'stop being a baby'. I could not even imagine the great pain of not feeling affection, love and kindness by those who are raising you. He, like many, was simply a child, who had his braids cut off upon arriving at school, not knowing a word of English, being consistently referred to as 'little savages', and lacking the essential parental love that each child deserves. Conclusively, Elder Armand, among many other residential school survivors are telling their truths regarding their residential schooling experience, whether that is with close confidants, within their community, or in greater society. This research ultimately serves to broadly highlight the immense struggles that have originated

from settler-colonialism, to Indigenous initial interactions with education to current day education for Indigenous peoples.

In summation, this project focused on Indigenous early school leavers as a means of addressing a population who collectively experience a variety of barriers to their educational pursuits. Concentrating on this population allowed for a glimpse of the varied educational pathways of Indigenous learners. As a personal note, I have always been aware that research in this area is valuable, but it was not until I thoroughly engaged in the process, that I realized how valuable it is. A large reason why I chose to engage in this research topic is because I am connected to it – 3 of 6 of my siblings who are of secondary graduation age, have attended ABE programming one or more times. This speaks volumes to Indigenous educational inequality. With regard to my siblings who have attended ABE programing, my sister completed secondary education as well as post-secondary education. I am very proud of all my siblings. I would like to conclude by stating that I am thoroughly grateful to have engaged with you all. Thank you, Glenda, Juliette, Jessie, Karnella, Jade, Erika, Danielle, Lee, Troy and Kevin – thank you for being vulnerable and sharing your truths. Thank you, Elder Armand, for providing invaluable insight and sharing your wisdom, experiences of hardship, and memories of fondness. Without all of you, I would not be here at this point in my journey.

References

Anisef, P., Brown, R., & Robson, K. (2013). Non-Traditional Postsecondary Education Pathways of Adult Learners in the Toronto District School Board: Evaluating the Influence of Individual and Neighbourhood Characteristics. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Arnošt Veselý. (2012). Education and the Reproduction of Inequalities, *Sociological Landscape - Theories, Realities and Trends*, Denis Erasga (Ed.), ISBN: 978-953-51-0460-5, InTech, Available from: http://www.intechopen.com/books/sociological-landscape-theories-realities-and-trends/education-and-the- reproduction-of-inequalities

Assembly of First Nations Supports Universities Canada Indigenous Education Principles Aimed at Closing the Education Gap. (2015, June 30). *Assembly of First Nations*. Retrieved from http://www.afn.ca/2015/06/30/6-30-15-assembly-of-first-nations-supports-universities-canada-indigen/

Atkinson, R. (2007). The Life Story Interview as a Bridge in Narrative Inquiry, *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*. Online ISBN: 9781452226552 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552 Print pages: 224-246, (p. 1-24). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Accessed January 13, 2019

Auchinachie, J. and Bowe, A. (2017). Complex Pathways in Adult Education: A Longitudinal Study, i-18. Retrieved from http://camosun.ca/learn/school/access/bios/Bowe-ComplexPathwaysReport.pdf

Battiste, M. (2002). Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy in First Nations Education: A Literature Review with Recommendations. Prepared for the National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), 1-69. Retrieved on May 26, 2019, from https://www.truworld.ca/__shared/assets/Battiste_2002_Indigenous_Knowledge_and_Pedagogy23663.pdf

Bruce, D., Marlin, A., and Raham, H. (2012). Literature Review on Factors Affecting the Transition of Aboriginal Youth from School to Work. Retrieved from Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) website: https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/298/Literature-Review-on-Factors_EN.pdf

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In: Richardson, J., Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. Westport, CT: Greenwood: 241–58.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1977). Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction. In J. Karabel and A.H. Halsey (Eds), *Power and Ideology in Education*. Oxford University Press; UK Ed.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. Reproduction in Education Society and Culture. Sage: London.

Canadian Council on Learning. (2007). *Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Metis Learning*. Available from

https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/5._2007_redefining_how_success_is_measured_en.pdf

Champagne, D. (2009). Contemporary Education. In *State of the world's indigenous peoples*, 129-150. New York: United Nations.

Champagne, D. (2015). Centering Indigenous Nations within Indigenous Methodologies. *Wizaco Sa Review, 30*(1), 57-81.

Cherubini, L., Hodson, J. Manley-Casmir, M. & Muir, C. (2010). 'Closing the Gap' at the Peril of Widening the Void: Implications of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Policy for Aboriginal Education. *Canadian Journal of Education, 33,* (2), 329-355.

Clandinin, D.J. (2007). Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology. Accessed January 13, 2019.
DOI: http://dx.doi.org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.4135/9781452226552

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1988). Studying teachers' knowledge of classrooms: Collaborative research, ethics and the negotiation of narrative. *The Journal of Educational Thought,* 22 (2A), 269-282.

Clark, A. D., Kleiman, S., Speinerman, L. B., Isaac, P. & Poolokasingham, G. (2014). "Do You Live in a Teepee?" Aboriginal Students' Experiences with Racial Micro aggressions in Canada. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 7,* (2), 112-125.

Community Action Fact Sheet: Residential Schools. Native Women's Association of Canada. Retrieved March 5, 2017, from https://nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Residential-Schools-Fact-Sheet.pdf

Connelly, F. M. and D. Jean Clandinin. 05 Apr 2006, *Narrative Inquiry from:* Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research Routledge
Accessed on: 22 Jan 2019
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203874769.ch28

Corbin Dwyer, S., & Buckle, J.L. (2009). The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 8(1), p. 54-63.

Drewes, T., & Meredith, T. (2015). *If at First You Don't Succeed: Toward an Adult Education and Training Strategy for Canada*. IRPP Study 54. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Flynn, S., Brown, J., Johnson, A., and Rodger, S. (2011). Barriers to Education for the Marginalized Adult Learner. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 57* (1), 43-58.

Gallop, C. J. & Bastien. N. (2016). Supporting Success: Aboriginal Students in Higher Education. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 46,* (2), 206-224.

Gerber, L. M. (2014) Education, Employment and Income Polarization Among Aboriginal Men and Women in Canada. *Canadian Ethnic Studies, 47* (1), 121-144.

Government of Canada. (2018). Retrieved May 26, 2019, from https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/services/first-nations-inuit-health/health-promotion/suicide-prevention.html

Government of Saskatchewan. Adult Basic Education. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/jobs-working-and-training/job-training-and-financial-support-programs/adult-education-and-skills-training/adult-basic-education

Hare, J. & Pidgeon, M. (2011). The Way of the Warrior: Indigenous Youth Navigating the Challenges of Schooling. *Canadian Journal of Education, 34,* (2), 93-111.

Harper, A.O & Thompson, S. (2017). Structural Oppressions Facing Indigenous Students in Canadian Education. *Fourth World Journal*, *15* (2), 41-66.

Jæger, M, M., & Møllegaard. (2017). Cultural Capital, Teacher Bias, and Educational Success: New Evidence from Monozygotic Twins. *Social Science Research*, 65. 130-144.

Joorst, Jerome. (2015). Towards a self-schooled habitus: how poor, rural working-class high school students in a rural West Coast township navigate their learning in limiting circumstances. *South African Review of Education, 21* (53).

Kerr, A. (2011). Adult Learners in Ontario Postsecondary Institutions. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. Retrieved May 26, 2019 from http://fnp-ppn.aandc-aadnc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Definitions.aspx?lang=eng

Issues in qualitative inquiry. (2010). In Butler-Kisber, L. *Qualitative inquiry* (pp. 13-23). 55 City Road, London: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781526435408

McGregor, D. (2018). From 'Decolonized' to Reconciliation Research in Canada: Drawing from Indigenous Research Paradigms. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 17*, (3), 810-831.

McKeown, S., Vedan, A., Mack, K., Jacknife, S., & Tolmie, C. (2018). *Indigenous Educational Pathways: Access, Mobility, and Persistence in the BC Post-Secondary System*. Vancouver, Canada: BC Council on Admissions and Transfer.

Milne, E. (2016). Educational Issues and Inequalities: Experiences of Indigenous Canadian Students. *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth, 20,* 65-89.

Ministry of the Economy. (2012). *Adult Education Foundations*. Government of Saskatchewan, Canada. Retrieved from http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/310/92214-Adult%20Education%20Foundations.pdf

National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH) (2017). Education as a Social Determinant of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Health.

OECD (2017), *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264279421-en.

Perna, L. W. (2013). Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education by Jenny M. Stuber (Review). Journal of College Student Development, 54 (2), 225-227. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2013.0013

Pidgeon, M. (2008). Pushing Against the Margins: Indigenous Theorizing of "Success" and Retention in Higher Education in *J College Student Retention, 10* (3), 339-360.

Pinnegar, S. & Daynes, J.G. (2012). Locating Narrative Inquiry Historically: Thematics in the Turn to Narrative In: Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552 Print pages: 3-34. Accessed January 13, 2019.

Raphael, D. (2016). Social Determinants of Health: Key Issues and Themes. In Dennis Raphael (Ed.), *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives, 3rd edition* (pp. 3-31). Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Riessman, C. (2000). Analysis of Personal Narratives. To appear in Handbook of Interviewing, edited by J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein, Sage Publications, 2001. Retrieved on May 28, 2019, from http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~brooks/storybiz/riessman.pdf

Riessman, C. K. (2005). Narrative Analysis. *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life* (pp. 1-7). University of Huddersfield: Huddersfield.

Statistics Canada. (2017). Education in Canada: Key Results from the 2016 Census, no. 11-001-X. Accessed 10 June 2019 from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/171129/dq171129a-eng.pdf?st=U6nlVvW6

Statistics Canada. (No date). Percentage of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit aged 25 to 64 by selected levels of educational attainment[1], Canada, 2006 and 2016 (table). *Other Visuals*. Last updated November 29, 2017. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/btd/othervisuals/other014 (Accessed February 12, 2018).

Stuber, J. (2011). Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington.

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium (2005). Aboriginal Institutions of Higher Education: A Struggle for the Education of Aboriginal Students, Control of Indigenous Knowledge, and Recognition of Aboriginal Institutions. *Canadian Race Relations Foundation,* 1-81.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015a). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Available from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

TRC. (2015b). *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation*. Winnipeg, MB: Truth and Reconciliation Commission. www.trc.ca.

Voyageur, C. J. (2011). Female First Nation Chiefs and the Colonial Legacy in Canada. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 35,* (3), 59-78.

Wishart, D. (2009). Dynamics of Education Policy and Practice for Urban Aboriginal Early School Leavers. *Policy and Practice for Aboriginal Early School Leavers, 55,* (4), 468-481.

White, M. (2013). Adult education: An essential element in a poverty reduction plan to improve economic opportunities for low-income individuals and families. *BCTF Information Handguide*, p. 1-8. Retrieved from https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/RR2013-02.pdf

Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous Methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 25*(2), 175-179.

Wotherspoon, T. (2002). The dynamics of social inclusion: Public education and Aboriginal people in Canada. *Perspectives on Social Inclusion, 26.* Toronto, ON: Laidlaw Foundation.

Yang, T. Y. & Wartburton, D. E. R. (2018). Indigenous Elders' Role in Fostering Intergenerational Relationships with Youth. *Health & Fitness Journal of Canada, 11,* (4), 88-93.